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# LIFE'S CHRIST PLACES

# LIFE'S CHRIST PLACES

BY

THE REV. JOSEPH AGNEW

DUNBAR

"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord."

EDINBURGH: T. & T. CLARK, 38 GEORGE ST.

1911

*Printed by*

MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED,

FOR

T. & T. CLARK, EDINBURGH.

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT, AND CO. LIMITED.

NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS.

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TO

THE MEMORY OF

MY FATHER

ERRATUM

On page 8, line 3, for "*Sartus*" read "*Sartor*."

# PREFACE.

These studies, originally prepared for a Bible Class, the writer has been asked to offer to a wider circle by those whose desires and opinions he feels bound to respect.

Any who may read them will perceive that all through the studies the great reserve is fully recognised. The transcendent uniqueness of the life with which they deal is reverently acknowledged.

But the cardinal fact of the Christian life is that the Christ and His own are one. And these are written in the hope that some may better understand, for their strength and comfort, that "it is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord."

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# CHAPTER I.

## BETHLEHEM—BEGINNINGS.

*"Ye princes of Jerusalem,*
*On the blue hills of Bethlehem,*
*Last night they heard the angels sing*
*Their song of welcome to your King.*
*(O sleepy baby mouth that clings,*
*While Mary Mother softly sings,*
*Far off, far off, the crosses three,*
*Far off the steeps of Calvary).*"

# CHAPTER I.

## BETHLEHEM—BEGINNINGS.

The ancient village of Bethlehem is unquestionably one of the most romantically interesting of famous places. It comes early into the light of sacred history. Close by is Ephrath, where Jacob laid the dust of his tenderly loved Rachel to rest. Possibly, indeed, Ephrath is the ancient name of Bethlehem. In Gen. xlviii. 7 the dying patriarch says: "Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way when there was yet but a little way to come unto Ephrath, and I buried her in the way of Ephrath." To this the explanatory note is added, "The same is Bethlehem." The generations pass, and Bethlehem is the scene of the exquisite idyll of Ruth. A few generations more, and Bethlehem is again conspicuous as the ancestral home of the shepherd lad David, who, after a stormy career, rose to the throne

of all Israel. Thus Bethlehem became a spot interwoven alike with the fairest traditions and the highest hopes of the Hebrew race. That is why the prophet Micah in later ages breaks into his impassioned prophecy: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the princes of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting."

Situated some six miles south of Jerusalem, and standing picturesquely on the ridge of Judah, Bethlehem is a fair and fertile spot. And the point to be kept in view, so far as the ultimate significance of Bethlehem is concerned, is, that the village was the centre of a pastoral district and the home of a simple, kindly, pastoral people. A rustic life of the best was lived there. Boaz was simply a respectable farmer, and so was his descendant, the father of David. Jesse was one of the class who teach their sons to work, and the care of the sheep was the task allotted to the future king. Though Jerusalem lay near, the men of Bethlehem did not share the city life and did not care for it. They were hardy, humble, and healthy crofters, farmers, and shepherds, the very class from whom the best

life of the world—physical, intellectual, and moral—has always come. Just as lads from the country often sweep all before them, at the Universities, in the Army, or on the Exchange, and rise to the highest posts of honour and fame, so some of the best in Israel came from Bethlehem. That is the truth which Micah really emphasises in his famous prophecy. Of course, the Messiah was looked for from the line of David, and this is probably in the prophet's mind when he alludes to the coming of the Christ from Bethlehem, the city and home of the great king. But the chief matter with Micah is the rustic and popular origin of the Messiah. He prophesies that the Deliverer will come from Bethlehem because he wants the people to look for His coming from among themselves. Messiah is not to be born in a palace on Zion, a son of the mighty, but in a Bethlehem home. He is to be one of the class from which the best blood and strength of the nation had always been recruited. He shall be a man of the people, a Saviour from Bethlehem.

Thus, while the Gospels make the fulfilment of the prophecy merely the birth of the Christ at a certain place, the real significance of the circumstance is the character of the place and

the class from which the Redeemer appeared. He comes, simple manhood, from the people.

We carry our thoughts back to that night nineteen hundred years ago when the Child of peasant folk was born in the stable of the Bethlehem inn. Reverent imagination surrounds the scene with heavenly accompaniments. All the heavens blaze with light, the angels come and sing their immortal Gloria, that very essence and soul of the Christian faith condensed into a brief but deathless beauty, the shepherds hear and adore. But the world did not know that a Child of the people was that night born at Bethlehem who should revolutionise the life of all the earth.

This is God's way of beginning His great things. That incalculably mighty movement destined to save the world, and reaching in its issues into the eternal worlds, begins at Bethlehem. Reserving the question of their authenticity, let any reverent student put all the alleged miraculous adjuncts of the birth of Jesus aside. For the matter of supremest importance in this connection is, that the Christ is obscurely and humbly born. When He emerges to His mission from the level of the populace, no one recalls anything special or distinctive about His origin. God,

that is to say, begins with life, with lowly, unadorned life. For it is in life only that God's possibilities lie.

> "Men think it is an awful sight
> To see a soul just set adrift
> On that drear voyage from whose night
> The ominous shadows never lift;
> But 'tis more awful to behold
> A helpless infant newly born,
> Whose little hands unconscious hold
> The keys of darkness and of morn."

These famous lines of James Russell Lowell hold a tremendous truth. Of course, men are born in different circumstances or surroundings. By the accident of birth one is the son of a duke and another of a ploughman, one the child of a wise scholar and another the child of a simple and unlettered soul, one a good man's son, another the son of a knave. It does not follow that the noble's son will prove truly lordly, the wise man's wise, the good man's good. Nor need the child of the humble be small of spirit or the evil man's child evil. Surroundings and training certainly count for much, so that one human being starts life advantaged and another heavily handicapped. Yet it is the life—the unadorned, essential life—that counts. That alone is the material which God moulds—the clay in the

hands of the Potter. Probably this is really the message of Carlyle in his grim and great *Sartus Resartus.* He teaches, as no other in the same manner and with equal force has taught, that the externals of life which we all emphasise overmuch are but as the clothes of being; it is the man who matters. Let a right soul be born, no matter where or of whom, let that soul come into right relations with God, and greatness and usefulness follow. God, as He chooses His agents, regards humanity, and not its accidents. As Burns sings—

> "The rank is but the guinea stamp,
> The man's the gowd."

And on the gold, wherever He finds it, whether in a king's palace or in a labourer's cottage, God sets the mint-mark of heaven. Thus the Christ comes from the ranks of the masses. The eternal word becomes flesh.

History affords many instances of God's unnoticed beginnings which throng on those who give the matter thought. What, *e.g.*, did it concern the world when David Livingstone was born in a weaver's house at Blantyre? But all the world knows and honours the saviour of Africa to-day, and his dust is in Westminster Abbey. God's be-

ginnings of mighty causes are like His dawns. Or, changing the figure, He does not bring the oak-tree into being at a stroke, but places His power in the acorn that falls to the earth with its promise of hundreds of years of vastness, and shade, and strength.

God, then, has His Bethlehem for the Christ, His unnoticed beginning for the Saviour of the world. Jesus appears only man, and through simple manhood Divinity becomes manifest. There is much here which may well be taken to heart. All earnest people are impressed by the magnitude of the tasks waiting to be done for the moral, material, and social betterment of the human race. Eager souls are often impatient and marvel why advance is so slow. They would like to see large and swift movements begun, and are apt to become doubting and faithless because they do not apparently begin. If the truth were confessed, those might be disclosed who are in their hearts even a little resentful because of the slowness of God. But God does not hurry. For Him time is not. Perhaps, even now, in some Bethlehem, a saviour of the world from certain of its great burdens or evils is born. The beginning of a salvation which we long to see has, it may

be, occurred. We may not live to see the end. For the faithful heart it is sufficient to see the beginning.

To all this there is a personal side. Life would be richer and ennobled by a greater spirit if men and women could but attain the belief that by any single and devoted life God may begin something of lasting significance and redeeming power. Our inveterate habit of regarding externals and accidentals so diverts our vision, that we miss the sight of this sublime possibility of human existence. What does the busy throbbing world, what do the great of the earth and the councils of the kings, know of the single individual life which moves unnoticed as a mere atom in the mass of the proletariat? But what of Bethlehem and the Child of the people born there? By any life—the lowliest and poorest life—God may, and if the soul wills God shall, begin that which is of immortal service and value. Nothing original, genuine, and true spoken or done by any life can be anything less than eternal. The grain of mustard seed is in itself nothing, but by virtue of its inherent vitality and power of development it becomes an untold possibility. It is so with the single soul vitalised by the spirit of the

living God, and so brought into the kinship of Jesus Christ. And thus the place of a man's new birth may become a Bethlehem and the new-born soul, alive to God, a beginning of that which shall not die, but live and serve eternally.

## CHAPTER II.

# THE TEMPLE (I.)—THE CHILD AND THE CHURCH.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE TEMPLE (I.)—THE CHILD AND THE CHURCH.

Among the places of the life of Jesus few have an interest so deep as that which attaches to the Temple. And the Temple visits are landmarks in His career. They represent crises in His history. Jesus goes, or is taken there; for the first time for presentation when He is an unconscious infant. By and by He goes of His own accord to the place which He has learned to call "His Father's House." Later He returns as a zealous reformer to purge a desecrated sanctuary. At last He pays His farewell visit to the superb pile, turning on the threshold to predict its utter overthrow to His amazed and startled disciples. Meanwhile, the first of these only concerns us. We deal with the first visit to the Temple—with the Child and the Church.

It is, of course, well known that this temple

to which the child Jesus was taken was the third and last central sanctuary of the Jews. For a long time after the settlement in Canaan there was extensive practice of local worship, coexisting with stated rites at the central shrine. But increasingly powerful influences tended to draw the religion of the race together and gather it about a single sacred place. Thus in process of time the local sanctuaries were abolished, and the whole religious ceremonial of the Jews became attached to the house of worship at Jerusalem. None of the more important religious rites could be performed anywhere else. The Temple, indeed, came to stand for, or represent, the religion of Israel.

This temple to which the child Jesus was taken was, as has been said already, the third and last. The first permanent building erected by Solomon seems to have been an adjunct of the royal palace, and to have had somewhat the character of a private chapel. If this was so during the reign of that brilliant monarch, yet, at all events, the Temple increasingly obtained the importance and prestige of being the supreme shrine and the distinctive abode of the nation's God. Destroyed when the city was taken and levelled by the Chaldeans,

Solomon's temple was, after an interval of not less than seventy or eighty years, replaced by another, which apparently had, even more than its predecessor, the character of a central sacred place, having neither association nor connection with a royal residence, but solely a religious and national significance. Amidst all the vicissitudes of the nation's history, the second temple stood for four hundred years, *i.e.* until the reign of Herod the Great. That prince, like others of a similar character, had a passion for building. It was his ambition to rear a temple of the utmost possible magnificence, and his object was no doubt in part political. Himself a half-Edomite, he was regarded somewhat suspiciously by the pure-blooded Jews, and by the erection of the Temple Herod probably hoped to ingratiate himself with his subjects. Building operations were begun on a gigantic scale, and carried on for between forty and fifty years. In fact, at the time of the presentation of Jesus the shrine proper could have been no more than newly finished. When completed the place was evidently a creation of marvellous beauty. Seen from a distance, the Temple must have had the appearance of a compact mass of square outline, all of pure white marble, in

parts profusely gilded. Allowing for all exaggeration of patriotic description, there can hardly have been in the world at the time another building of equal magnificence.

At the time of Jesus, however, the deplorable fact was, that the religion of Israel had almost lost its soul. A sadly familiar phenomenon in the religious history of the world had again occurred. Just as the external grandeur and elaborations of the people's worship increased, its real spirituality diminished. The priests of the higher grades were nearly to a man Sadducees, men, *i.e.*, who aimed at the modification and broadening of the life of Israel by the introduction of world-culture and civilisation. They were, to a large extent, men without religious earnestness, ambitious worldings who held to their posts for the sake of the gain and status which these brought. One has only to think of Annas and Caiaphas to realise the manner of persons who were at the head of the religion of Israel. It was there, at Jerusalem, and then, in the days of Jesus, as it was in the latter years of the French Empire, when many of the priests of Rome who held the most important ecclesiastical posts in France were merely polished men

of the world, not a few of them being religious sceptics. Of course, not all the Jewish priests were of this sort. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, is a striking exception, and there must have been others like him. Then, when we find in the Temple such holy souls as Simeon and Anna, we can see that the national religion still held the power of bringing devout hearts near God. But the best religious life of Israel lay outside of the official priestly class. Not in the great Temple, but in the glens of Galilee and the uplands of Judah, God had His own faithful people. At the Temple there was little more than a gorgeous formalism.

To the Temple, however, the centre of the religion of His race—to what was still the House of His Father—Jesus was brought when He cannot have been more than a few weeks old. This ceremonial of presentation was very ancient. But it is very important to bear in mind in connection with this event in the early life of Jesus that the passage in St. Luke (ch. ii. 21–24) which is commonly regarded as being the story of the presentation really describes two acts which have no real connection the one with the other. These are the presentation of the Child and the purification of His mother, Mary. The writer runs

the account of these two ceremonials together in such a way that the passage reads as if one act were being described. According to the Levitical Law, the mother of a boy-child was required, when forty days after the child's birth had passed, to appear in the Temple for the ceremonial of purification and to make an offering, which in the case of the poorest of the people might be two young pigeons or turtle-doves, instead of the lamb and dove exacted from the wealthier. Of the creatures thus offered one was used for a burnt-offering and one for a sin-offering. We are led to infer, therefore, that when Joseph went to the Temple to present the child Jesus, Mary took the opportunity to accompany him for the purpose of undergoing the ceremonial of purification. But the two ceremonials are distinct and apart, and the offering of the doves has not anything to do with the presentation. Though Joseph and Mary go together to the Temple, it is Joseph alone who presents the babe. But the grouping of the two incidents in the narrative is of value as showing that when taken to the Holy House Jesus cannot have been more than about six weeks old.

This ceremony of presentation, required in the case of every first-born son, points back to

the traditional deliverance of the nation from the captivity of Egypt. And the idea originally was that every first-born son ought to be solemnly dedicated to God for priestly service, in token that the first-born of Israel had been rescued by God when the last plague fell on Egypt. Later, however, the tradition ran, the members of the tribe of Levi were chosen for priestly service, instead of the first-born of each family. It was therefore ordained that as many first-born as there were in Israel in excess of the number of Levites must be redeemed from service by the payment of five shekels. Subsequently it was ordained that every first-born son must be presented and redeemed by the payment of this amount; and though the fact is not mentioned, this sum must have been paid by Joseph for Jesus at the time of presentation. The ceremony was, we are told, very simple. Entering the Outer Court—or Court of the Women—the father of the child presented him to the officiating priest for the day in very much the same manner as a child is held out for baptism in our Church. Then the priest offered up two prayers or benedictions—one on behalf of the child for the law of redemption, the other on behalf of the

mother for the gift of a first-born. Thus the ceremonial really was a dedication or consecration of the young life to God. It was an acknowledgment that the life was His, and might, if He willed, be claimed for His service.

Here, then, at the very beginning of the Christ's life, we find in a beautiful and suggestive association—"The Child and the Church." The first place with which Jesus is publicly associated after His birth at Bethlehem is the church. That is to say, He is brought into connection with the external form in which the religion of His day and race was manifested. It might have been supposed that the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who came to do His Father's will, would have been exempted from this rite. But nothing is more conspicuous through the whole life of Jesus than His punctilious observance of every religious requirement of His nation. He pays the Temple tax, though, as He says to Peter, He might well have claimed to be freed from that. And nothing could ever have been further from His holy thought than a repudiation of the simple act of presentation done for Him when He was an unconscious infant. It did not matter

that the religion of Israel was decadent and worked by unworthy men. Every one who studies the matter knows that the tendency of almost all religions is towards deterioration. Yet it is possible even in the most degenerate age to find the old sacred meaning and spiritual benefit in what the hands of men have spoiled. We mortal creatures do not seem to be able to touch spiritual things without lowering them down to our own standard. Hawthorn's remark about the Church of Rome, that it would be a perfect system if it could only be worked by angels, seems to us, at times, to be true of other systems besides Rome's. Yet, all the same, the spiritual significances and possibilities remain. Jesus, the Son of God, was taken even in a formal age to His Father's House, that it might be professed for Him that He was God's and belonged to God. And Jesus never forgot that it had been so.

In the history of God's Church, both in the Old Testament times and in the New, a place is found for the child. With us the ceremonials of circumcision and presentation are replaced by the sacrament of baptism, which combines the meaning of both and adds the further divine meaning that there is for every child

born of woman the necessity of cleansing by that which the baptismal water symbolises—the surrendered life of Christ, which, according to the usage of Hebrew thought, the Biblical writers call His blood. One cannot but have a great admiration for the community of the Baptists, and one may appreciate their position even when in disagreement with it. But it is not uncharitable to say that the Baptist Church is in part defective in this respect, that it has no religious reception of the child by any fixed rite. If infant baptism is repudiated, then there certainly ought to be in lieu of it some sort of sacred service of presentation and dedication. A Church which lacks this lacks one of the divinest and most significant elements in its order.

But, taking the general body of the Christian Church and speaking broadly, that which was done in the Old Testament Church for a first-born son is done to-day with an added significance for every child born within the pale of the Christian Church. Like the child Jesus, each Christian child is solemnly brought to God and presented and dedicated to Him. Whatever may be in the minds of those who bring their children to baptism, that, in the sight of the Church, is what really

happens. The child is received by the Church, and the Church thereby claims the child for God and His service. And yet how many people have ever taken serious thought of the significance of their baptism and of the place which it has, or ought to have, in their lives? Within the Church of Rome and in a section of the Anglican Church, as well as by the Church of the East, it is believed that in the act of baptism a child is regenerated to God. By the majority of the reformed Churches—practically by all of them—this doctrine is repudiated. But it is nevertheless held, and that strongly, that though a child is not necessarily made a new creature in baptism, a child may be, by the power and presence of the Holy Ghost, operating through the ordinance. All depends on the faith and prayer of those who take part in the rite, whether as celebrants, parents, or onlookers. Perhaps much—perhaps more than most men and women imagine—of the religious life which Christian people possess dates back to the hour when they were solemnly given to God. For this reason the Church lays stress on the relation of the child to the Church. What the Son of God received we receive. This holy act of presentation in the

Temple is a lesson and a reminder to all the ages. Jesus in His after-life carried out to the fullest what was symbolised by His presentation in His Father's House. The Church looks now for the same spirit in all within her borders who reach the period of self-determination. It is expected that they shall carry out, of free choice, that which was done for them when they were unconscious infants. No one who gives serious thought to the matter will dream, surely, of repudiating the sacred presentation of infancy, or of denying the acknowledgment thus made, that the life, by right, is God's. That can never be with those who in any measure at all feel that the seal of God is upon them, and from whom God and God's Church look for nothing less than this—that in the way of the Christ-life and with Christ they shall give their individual self-conscious lives to the love of His ways, and willingly to that service which, from first to last, is the doing of His Holy Will.

# CHAPTER III.

# EGYPT—SHELTERS.

## CHAPTER III.

### EGYPT—SHELTERS.

Much as we could have wished fuller information on the intensely fascinating subject, yet we have to be content with very brief and fragmentary references to the infancy of Jesus. The ministry and the end of the life count for so much that the incidents of its beginning are not elaborated. It must also be borne in mind that the Gospels are not to be taken as, and do not profess to be, connected and complete accounts of the life of Jesus. They rather are collections of sayings and of recorded or traditional deeds, strung in each case upon a slender thread of narrative. Each evangelist wrote for a special purpose and with a certain class of readers before his mind. Thus each man selects and uses what suits his own immediate purpose. The aim in each case is to present a view of the life and work and teaching of Jesus from

a certain viewpoint. For that purpose the method adopted in the compilation of the existing Gospels was probably that of selection from the various sources—written, oral, or traditional—and the arrangement of the material thus selected according to a definite plan. These facts are mentioned because they help us to realise why the references to the infancy are so brief, and why one evangelist mentions matters of which another takes no notice. Mark and John do not deal with the birth and infancy at all, the variations in the narratives of this period being solely between those of Matthew and Luke. This Egypt interlude is peculiar to Matthew. Luke's narrative reads as if after the presentation, Joseph and Mary, with the Babe, returned directly home to Nazareth (cf. Luke ii. 39). There is not the slightest allusion to a visit to Egypt. In this study critical questions do not call for examination. It is sufficient to state that St. Luke's omission of the Egyptian residence does not necessarily invalidate the story. What the omission means may be that for his special purpose St. Luke did not find it necessary to mention the matter. St. Matthew, on the other hand, writing, as it is believed, for Hebrew Christians,

wishes to show how prophecy is fulfilled in and by Jesus the Christ, and he therefore introduces the flight to Egypt because he wishes to link it on to, and show it as, a fulfilment of the prophecy in Hos. xi. 1: "I . . . called my son out of Egypt."

The "Flight" is closely associated in the history with the beautiful story of the visit of the three Eastern Magi and their interview with Herod when in search for information about the infant King of the Jews. What space of time separates the presentation, the visit of the Magi, and the flight is in each instance uncertain, but the impression left by the narrative is that the events were closely subsequent. We are here in the region of obscurity and conjecture, and have only glimpses of events as swift and brief as the glimpses of landscapes seen through the folds of sweeping mists. Nor can any hand now part the shadowy veils that lie over the places where the young Child lay.

What concerns us, however, is the place to which Jesus is alleged to have been taken for shelter. It was Egypt. This was the country which lay nearest, and which was most convenient to Judea. The journey by the direct route was short, and, once there, a fugitive

family would be lost in the mass of the general population. Besides, when in Egypt a stranger would have an asylum as being under another jurisdiction. There was no possible security for the Holy Family in any part of Israel—north, south, or east—and Babylon was too far off. But Egypt offered a close and ready shelter. As Dr. Farrar remarks in his *Life of Christ*, "Egypt has in all ages been the natural place of refuge for all who were driven from Palestine by distress, persecution, or discontent." The "Rises of Egypt," or the Gorge of the Rhinokolura, might have been reached by the fugitives in three days, and once upon the further bank they were safe.

Of the flight and the duration of it Scripture gives us no particulars, only telling us that the Holy Family fled by night, returning when Joseph had been assured by a dream that it would be safe to bring the Child back to the land of His nativity. Of course, almost innumerable legends have grown up round the incident, and these have been a favourite theme of medieval, and especially of Italian, art. But all this wealth of fanciful creation stands in remarkable contrast to the simplicity of the gospel story. So reticent, indeed, is

St. Matthew, the narrator, that he neither tells us where the family lived when in Egypt, nor the length of the residence there. Ancient legend says that they were absent two years from Palestine, and lived at Matarieh, the ancient Heliopolis, which lay a few miles north-east from Cairo. This is probable enough, for we know from other sources that there was a considerable Jewish population at Matarieh. That fact would have weight with Joseph as affording him a prospect of suitable employment. And, in any case, the duration of the residence in Egypt cannot have been long, for the death of Herod occurred very soon after the period at which the flight is alleged to have occurred.

But the fact on which attention must be fixed is that we find Jesus in Egypt. This is one of the places of His earthly life, and we may call it a "Shelter." And a point of importance to be noticed here is the absence of supernatural interference. That is only characteristic of what we find from first to last. God never interposes any supernatural power between Jesus and His dangers and hardships at any time. Nothing is done for Jesus, nothing is done for any one, when human resources are of themselves sufficient.

Let no one expect miracles to happen for him, no matter how well he loves God, no matter how faithfully he serves the ideals. Men must work out their own salvation. All of the supernatural indicated in this story is the direction to Joseph to go down into Egypt. The safety of the Babe is left to the resource of Joseph and the wakeful love of Mary's mother heart. Prudence is the guide, and prudence points to Egypt. The Babe is *sheltered* there.

Egypt is a shelter in which the young life is kept unharmed for its future. This is the significance of that place in the life of Jesus. Nothing is going to hurt Him until His hour arrives. Meanwhile Jesus gives nothing to Egypt. Egypt at first gives everything to Him, all unaware of the vast part which it is playing in the religious history of the world. And when we read the lives of great men we are impressed by the part which the shelters of life almost always play in the mighty movements of the life of humanity. Though there is no visible interference, yet God takes care of His own. For the most part the lives that serve the world have been sheltered from the hostility of evil. How much do we really know of the early lives of good and great men

and women? As a rule very little. But we can trace the lines of their histories back to the shelters, to the secluded places where the guarded life grew and was kept for God.

Every thoughtful person knows, of course, how absolutely essential it is that young unconscious life should be protected from the dangers that surround existence—from accident, disease, or exposure. Every careful home is a shelter. We all know that, had it not been that love watched us in some Egypt long ago, we had not now been alive on the earth. For the Herods that prey on life must be eluded or warded off. But this usual and common guarding is not all the guarding by which men are blessed. There are Herods who are on the watch for the life of the soul, and the soul cannot be too soon sheltered. One may say strongly indeed that in this matter a tremendous responsibility rests on those who have the care of young life. In the home itself one must guard against the intrusion or obtrusion of evil things that may hurt or contaminate innocence. The infinite pity of it when infant-life first learns what anger, or intemperance, or envy, or evil-speaking, or wickedness of any kind are in its own home, when the place which should be a shelter

becomes a danger. "It must be that offences come. But woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."

There is, certainly, a kind of guarding which is utterly foolish. Some people are so exasperatingly careful of children, that self-indulgent folly takes the place of unselfish and watchful prudence. A shelter need not be a conservatory, and must not be, for human life is not meant to be an exotic. Life, while sheltered, must be wisely taught to know what evil is and where, and how to resist and guard. It is ill for the untried soul which is suddenly flung out unprepared to face the world. Many of the shipwrecks of life can be explained thus. Let the young life be taught to use the chart that tells where the reefs and quicksands lie. In the shelters we are prepared.

But there is a cry to-day for shelters. We are horrified at the tale of the massacre of the innocents, and some of us have no doubt felt at times as if it would have been a positive luxury to take the tyrant by the throat. Let us look rather to something more immediate and practical. A massacre of the innocents is going on now, and the extent of it is appalling. The waste of child-

life even in our own land is absolutely terrible. Only a very small percentage of infants, comparatively, grow to maturity. The Herods of neglect, poverty, drunkenness, ignorance, and vice are slaying the children by scores daily. We need the shelters for the shelterless. God is not going to interfere directly in the matter; our duty is left to us in whom the Spirit of God is. Does not Egypt in the Christ-life stand for what God would have us provide for the children to-day? What may not be done even by one shelter? And what are the homes of Müller, Barnardo, Quarrier, and such Christlike souls as these? Egypts all.

Most people have to thank God for the shelter of their early days. How many realise that there is not anything in their lives calling for profounder, more practical gratitude than that? There is certainly a call upon Christ's own to see to the rescue and the sheltering of the desolate and endangered child-life of the world. At its beginning that Life which was to do the will of God and bear the Cross had to be sheltered, that in coming days it might offer the Father the devotion and service of the mature and strong spirit. All life which shall be for the

service of God and man seeks shelter also at its beginning. No man can do a diviner work than he does who offers this; no man can receive in fuller measure the blessedness of the word which the Master shall say, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of one of these, ye did it unto me."

# CHAPTER IV.

# NAZARETH—UPBRINGINGS.

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When in the Christ-life we approach Nazareth, we draw more closely to the region of certainty. There is unanimity in the testimony of the Gospels as to the statement that Nazareth was the scene of the early life—indeed, of almost the whole life—of Jesus. All four Gospels agree in this—those of St. Mark and St. John incidentally, of course, but not the less emphatically.

It is well known that St. Luke's narrative reads as if Jesus had been taken to Nazareth by Joseph and Mary immediately after the ceremony of presentation. St. Matthew's account is more detailed and elaborate in this particular. His account bears that it was the intention of Joseph to return to Bethlehem after coming up out of Egypt on the death of Herod. But on learning that Archelaus, one of Herod's sons, now ruled in the south,

Joseph resolved to betake himself to a safer retreat, and sought, therefore, the hill village of Nazareth in the north. This Archelaus was a man who, though he lacked his father's ability and power, possessed many of his evil qualities, and Joseph felt that in his dominions there would be continual danger. In Nazareth he would still be under the rule of another of Herod's sons—Antipas—between whom and Archelaus the kingdom was divided on their father's death. But Antipas, though a man of no higher principles than his brother —as his subsequent actions show—was less likely to be goaded into savage acts against his people, since he received less provocation from them than Archelaus had to receive from the fiercely orthodox population of Judea. Nazareth was then, on the whole, safer than the south, and the position of the place was secluded. Life there was close to, and yet apart from, the rush of the world.

This Christ place is one of the most supremely important, though, so far as direct narrative is concerned, it is one of those of which we know least. The public ministry of Jesus lasted for only between two and three years, and, even allowing for the Egypt residence, he must therefore have spent about

thirty years—in other words, nearly the whole of his human life—at Nazareth.

Nazareth is, then, the place of Jesus' upbringing. And that, from one point of view, is the most supremely important place in any life. But in order to estimate its influence upon one's character and history, on the moulding of the mind, and on the soul's outlook, the nature of the place of a life's upbringing must be considered. Those who have even an elementary knowledge of the geography of the Holy Land know the position of Nazareth and its characteristics. It lies among the hills which border the northern side of the great plain of Esdraelon. The village is about twelve hundred feet above sea-level, and some of the surrounding hills rise five hundred feet higher. Nazareth is indeed a hill town. After ascending for a time by a narrow and rough mountain track, the traveller reaches a spot where the path suddenly dips, and Nazareth lies before him in a sort of cup or basin among the hills. The modern town stretches partly along the bottom of the valley and partly over the slope behind. But it is conjectured, from the remains still visible, that in the time of Jesus the town rose higher up the hill and

almost to the top. Nazareth, therefore, was a place apart, near to and yet aside from the wider life of the land—"neither in the busy world nor quite beyond it."

The view from Nazareth is, of course, very limited, the town being shut in by an amphitheatre of heights. But when one ascends the hill at the back of the town to the north, the view is described as superb and of wide extent. Galilee lies like a map at one's feet. Twenty miles off and to the south are the heights and promontory of Carmel. Between is the great plain of Esdraelon, and westwards a glimpse of the sea and the Bay of Acre. Tabor and the mountains of Gilead are visible, and so also are the peaks of Hermon sixty miles away. It is, as has been said, "a map of Old Testament history."

Now, few things mark a life more than the places of its upbringings. In the early years human nature is plastic and receptive, so that lasting impressions are made and the bases of character often laid then. Good implanted or inculcated between the ages of three to twelve is incalculable, and evil implanted then can hardly be eradicated. Early influences count for much in the history of a human life. Any thoughtful observer can therefore tell, after

a little intercourse with him, where a man was brought up and how. There is no mistaking the city-bred person, and the differences between him and one whose youth was spent by the seashore, among the mountains, or in the lowlands of Scotland, or the midlands of England, are very marked. Each looks at life from his own viewpoint, each has his thought and spirit life distinctively coloured and toned. Of course, a great deal depends on the individual soul. Some are not impressionable, and are deficient on the imaginative side. There are those in the world of whom one may say that the question as to where they were reared or how does not greatly matter, so unimpressionable are they. Others, again, respond to influences like clay to the hands of the potter. And that pure being of Jesus, sensitive beyond thought or description, responded at once to all that came to Him from Nazareth and the home there. Nazareth helped to make and mould the Christ.

What, then, were some of the lasting influences which His Nazareth upbringings brought in upon the soul of Jesus? In the first instance, we observe that He has a wide and sympathetic acquaintance with nature. He shows a strange and far insight into the

secret message and mission of nature; for Him nature interprets and illustrates God. We observe, for example, how Jesus knows, with the knowledge of one who has observed them closely and lovingly, the flowers of the field and the birds of the air. Those who are familiar with Nazareth and its surroundings tell us that the beauty of the Nazareth wild flowers is wonderful, the colours being so deep, rich, and varied. And the bird-life is plentiful. A great many of our familiar wild birds haunt the hills round Nazareth; the lark is heard, and the homely sparrow flits about the streets. But Jesus looked on them all with the clear eyes of one who knew God, and who brought to nature a knowledge of the Divine. He did not discover God through nature, but brought God to nature, and thus found the eternal power and presence there. The way to find a fuller knowledge of God through nature is to approach nature with a knowledge of God. Bring to nature a soul alive with the spirit which is the soul of nature, and the soul meets with and recognises that which is spiritual. A dull, unspiritual soul will find nothing holy in the external universe and its glories. To him the primrose will be nothing but the primrose,

because his heart is not in communion with its Creator. Nor need the unbelieving astronomer be called mad; he may be only stupidly unspiritual. It is the man in touch with God who knows that, if he but knew a flower held in his hand, root and all, and all in all, he would "know what God and man is."

To Jesus, at home with God, the beauty and wonder of animate and inanimate nature spoke of the care, and love, and close condescending carefulness of the Father. For Him the world was the Father's House, and He saw everywhere the touches of the Father's hand and the tokens of the Father's might and grace. It has to be observed, however, that Jesus draws none of His illustrative teaching from the sea. All that He knew of it was the glimpse of a far-away blue glimmer seen from the hilltops above His home. And this is characteristic of His race and training. The Jews were not a sea people, and they did not know the spell of the oceans. We turn to Gennesareth—the small hill-cradled lake where His fisher friends of after-days toiled—to see that the soul of Jesus is mightier than wind-swept waters in the nights of fear.

Let it be next noticed that the upbringing of Jesus at Nazareth, in a home of the people,

gives Him a close and sympathetic knowledge of humble and ordinary human life. Indeed, we may say that His Nazareth life and its conditions give the spirit and teaching of Jesus that singular humanness which is so observable in later days. A careful reading of the Gospels reveals a multitude of descriptive touches which show, on the part of Jesus, a wide and interested acquaintance with the everyday life of the people. The two men in the field, the two women grinding at the hand-mill, the sowing in the different kinds of ground, the man coming at night to borrow three loaves from his friend and rousing the whole street with his persistent knocking, the wedding, the guests, and the bridesmaids—all the homely human drama of the Gospels went on at Nazareth, and in Nazareth Jesus learned it all. And surely his life is rich and graciously helpful who has been taught in youth to look for the meaning, the power, the pathos, sometimes the divineness of the ordinary life of ordinary men and women. Let men approach that life with the eyes and heart of Jesus, and try to teach the young what they may see and know. It is thus that a man comes into living and moving touch with men.

Once more, from Nazareth Jesus had the

wider outlook. From boyhood He had but to climb the height behind His home to see the long roads reaching beyond the horizons to the verges of the known world. There were the roads leading to Rome, and far off upon them, at times, one might see the sparkle of her marching legions. There was the road by which the merchant went seeking goodly pearls, and by which the man who left his servants in trust with his possessions went into a far country. There, too, was the road by which the prodigal went and came—had Jesus seen and known him at Nazareth? Surely living in a small place need narrow no one. The smallest place on earth is in touch with the world; lines go out from it to the ends of the earth. All that is needed is that one should have eyes and thought for the wider worlds so closely linked with ours, and should be early taught the wider vision. For it is thus, largely, that we come into sympathy and touch with the world, whether the place of one's upbringings be where the road leading to the world goes up the slope from a hidden village and disappears, or whether one is reared where the ships lie which go and come to and from the ends of the earth.

Another point may be noted, because it

counts for much. Any thoughtful study of the Christ-life reveals the fact that He was deeply imbued with the spirit of His race and felt the inspiration of its nobler history. He learned it all as the youths of the nation did; but, besides, a glance from the heights of Nazareth could not but bring many of the more stirring events and powerful personalities of the past vividly home to a soul like His. Not a few of the famous places in Hebrew story associated with memorable men lay full in view from the surrounding summits. And as Jesus looked He pondered, and the thrill of the strength and glory of bygone ages moved His spirit. It may be so with ourselves. Wherever the places of our upbringings may be we are never far, in this little land of ours, from the spots round which the most sacred associations gather. Sites of battles which made history, birthplaces of heroes, martyr graves, streets where the stones seem to speak—we are near them all. In the presence of these any receptive soul cannot but be moved to a truer patriotism and a nobler devotion to the freedom and faith of our fathers. In the presence of these the might of the past becomes the inspiration of the present. For though memories become

hoary, "Yet, and yet, we cannot forget—and we would not."

The place of upbringings counts for much in every human life. Is it not possible that for this cause each human life may make some contribution—small perhaps, yet all its own—to the greater life of the world? We feel, think, and regard things very much according to the conditions and character of our early upbringings, and what we can give, the world needs. But, at all events, what abides true is the supreme fact that it is possible to reach the vaster spiritual insight and outlook by what the places of our youth can give and teach. We may come to know and love nature, and man in his humble, usual life; we may learn to have a heart for the holy causes and a deeper trust in God. Any young soul anywhere may be taught these things, and may acquire wisdom, sympathy, and largeness of heart even from what men call the commonplace and the familiar. Even in the slum there are the sky, and the clouds, and the stars, if not the birds and the lilies. As Jesus was at Nazareth so any earnest soul may become. In all things He hath the preeminence, and it is He, above all others, who has taught us how the humblest and most

remote place on earth may give to any earnest soul the spiritual possessions which are eternal and the wider vision which makes life great in the love of God—and man.

# CHAPTER V.

# THE TEMPLE (II.)— EARLY INTEREST IN RELIGION.

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About the story of the visit of the twelve-years-old Boy to His Father's House there is an exhaustless charm. That has been felt in all the Christian ages, and the event has alike arrested imagination and stimulated the purest art. But the value and significance of the incident lie rather in what it reveals. Among other things it reveals—and this is of the utmost practical importance—early interest in religion.

This was not the first visit of Jesus to the Temple. He was taken there as an unconscious infant; now He is taken in conscious interest and expectancy as a developing youth. By and by He will go of His own accord. Meanwhile this visit of Jesus with His parents marks a new epoch in His life. It is His introduction to all that is associated in His mind with what is supreme in religion.

Jesus is now past the dawn and at the fresh morning of human intelligence.

> "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing boy,
> But he beholds the light, and whence it flows
> He sees it in his joy."

To Jesus the light shone more and more unto the perfect day, and before its glory the walls of the prison-house that close round us dissolved utterly away. And He went to Jerusalem by the way of the light of His life.

For this event in the early history of Jesus there had been, of course, a certain preparation. There was preparation of an inward and secret character of which we may not speak, because, when we draw near that, we approach the edge of mystery. He calls the Temple His "Father's House," and we thus learn the supremely important fact that in the young mind of Jesus there had already grown up a conviction that God was His Father. It is also perfectly evident that this sense of the Divine Fatherhood was something deeper and more soul-satisfying than any feeling of the sort ever before experienced. Jesus possesses this conviction already at the age of twelve years, but how and when the idea came

to Him can never be known. Who can presume to speak of the movings of the Spirit upon any man's soul? and that solitary soul is transcendently apart. What matters for us is the fact that already we see Jesus growing up into that full consciousness of His Sonship which bore Him up and gave Him strength and peace to the end. The secret of it we must reverently leave hidden in the infinite of His being.

But we are on ground where we may more safely tread when we come to the other religious influences which must have been brought to bear on the youth of Jesus. The Temple interlude, when the impenetrable veil that hides His early years lifts for a few moments, shows us Jesus not at Nazareth, but at Jerusalem. What we see of Him there, however, is to a large extent a revelation of what had been going on in His northern home. And we may confidently take, as among the chief of the influences which affected the life of Jesus, that of a pure and happy family life—pure and happy because religious. Nowhere has family life been evident in such perfection and beauty as among the Jews. The position of woman in the Jewish home of the age of Jesus was very honourable,

and between husband and wife there existed a remarkable affection and devotion. And the children were the centre round which the household life gathered. The mother had much to do with the religious training of the young lives under her care, and we may ascribe to Mary supreme influence in the development of her wonderful Child. His was, if a poor, yet a peaceful and happy home, where the influence and atmosphere were religious, and where the children gave their parents honour, reverence, and obedience, based on the teaching of religion.

For in a Jewish home a large place was given to the teaching of religion. Both parents took an active part in a child's early education. Every father was required to teach his children the precepts of the law and the history of religion. In fact, a boy had to begin to commit the law to memory when he reached the age of five years. Almost as soon as he could speak he had to learn the lessons and petitions of the morning prayer. Then many of the religious feasts and special rites were so arranged that the children were stimulated to ask their meaning. This would be the order of the Nazareth home.

Again, a Jewish child was, from an early

age, required to accompany his parents to morning and evening prayers in the synagogue and to the Sabbath services, being encouraged to ask questions about these. In addition to these influences, Jesus, like all Jewish children, would attend the public school from the age of six or seven. There He would be taught to read and write, but the instruction was, on the whole, religious. It consisted very much in training in the law—a great part of which had to be committed to memory—and in the nation's history.

Now all this—when understood—serves to show how religious the environment of Jesus' young life must have been. It is hardly possible for us to realise how largely religion was interwoven with the whole life of the Jews. Religion prevailed everywhere, pervading and dominating all things in the home, the community, the State. Almost every action, from the time when one rose in the morning until the time when one went to rest at night, had some attendant religious significance. Washing, eating, working, buying, selling—everything, in short, had its special religious ceremonial or usage. In fact, a Jew, from infancy, was steeped in religion. The distinction between the secular and sacred,

of which we make so much, did not exist in Israel.

Of course the inevitable tendency of all this was towards formalism. Vital religion—essential spiritual religion—was apt to be lost under the mass of ceremonial. Yet, all the same, the devout and earnest drew divine truth and life from their surroundings, and this was outstandingly the case with Jesus. He drank in truth and life from the religion that lay about Him in His early years and always.

Now this is an element which, to a large extent, modern life seems to lack. Religion with us has become an abstract affair; it is —and conspicuously so—something away from active practical life, the line between the secular and the sacred being sharply drawn—and unwarrantedly so. Certainly our religion is not a series of observances, but a religion of great spiritual truths, a religion of enthusiasms, ideals, and principles. But what is not yet accomplished—and it is almost everything—is the general pervasion of our usual lives by these and the consequent transformation of life into the image of the heavenly. There is a missing link not yet supplied—the link, namely, between Christian idealisms and practical

human existence. A mighty task waits—the task of bringing religion down to and into life. Children in Christian homes and in the schools of the nation receive what is called "religious instruction," but this too often means the simple imparting of religious information. What is urgently to be desired is the awaking of early interest in religion, the familiarising of young life from infancy with the great religious ideas of our faith. From the earliest possible years children might, and should be, shown how Christianity may be applied in every detail of human existence; that, whether in the home, in the sphere of amusement, at business, or anywhere, religion may be applied and observed so that life itself may become religious. Modern life ought, in this supreme sense, to be incalculably more religious than that of the Jews—and vitally so—because modern life is meant to be ruled by the spirit of goodness. For those with whom the future lies there is a distinct and a mighty mission. In this generation, when men are sitting more lightly to the externals of religion, those are wanted who shall set themselves to the task of seeking that the lives whom they influence shall have a surrounding of religious truth and idea which shall mould

them for God. This is the work to which, above all others, God calls His own to-day.

Well, the veil lifts, and we find the boy Jesus at the Temple. The event, long anticipated, was accomplished. How many remember the day when they were first taken to church to see a communion service? For the wonder and awe of the occasion produce an unforgettable impression. But what we experience then is only a pale hint of what the pure soul of Jesus experienced when He entered His Father's House for the first time in His conscious life. When we remember that the Temple stood for all that was supreme in the religion which He had been taught, and remember also that by this time He had come to the conviction that God was His Father, we can form some faint conception of what this event in His history meant for Jesus. At the age of twelve a Jewish boy became—as it was put—a child of the law. He donned the phylactery, or fringed praying scarf, and shared in the worship of grown men. In fact, this visit of Jesus to the Temple was very much what a first communion is with us. But Jesus went to a great scene. At the Passover Feast Jerusalem was thronged with Jews from all

the countries of the known world. Services at the Temple went on all day long, and the appearance of the city and the Temple courts must have been a curious blending of the imposing and the picturesque. Within the sacred area scenes were enacted—by no means creditable—which Jesus, when He came to maturity and to His ministry, emphatically and sternly denounced. But at His first visit these things probably did not attract His attention. His whole soul would be absorbed in the holy place itself and its rites. We may well believe that He was continually there, eager, worshipping, interested, and engrossed. A Jewish youth of that age had more liberty and was counted more responsible than with us, and we may surmise, therefore, that Jesus was left very much alone to follow His bent. But while other youths were no doubt attracted by the endless variety of sights and interests, the Temple was the central point of attraction for Jesus. The dream of His life was at last realised. He was in His "Father's House."

Considering the terrific bustle and confusion attendant upon the departure from Jerusalem of a crowd so vast, it is not surprising that Joseph and Mary did not at first

miss the Boy. How true it is that even the closest and dearest sometimes misunderstand their own. There were deeps in that child-life which Joseph and Mary did not know. And therefore they seek Him everywhere but the right place. It is only when, as a last resort, they seek the Temple that their search is rewarded. But nothing could be more foreign to a true conception of Jesus—modest and lowly as He ever was—than that when found He was consciously making Himself conspicuous before the learned of His nation. All sorts of fantastic legends have grown up round the incident, and sacred art represents Him as standing halo-circled before amazed and overawed men with hoary heads. It is an absurd conception. The reality in point of fact is that He had been attracted to one of the many schools of pupils taught—in this case—by some famous rabbi—possibly the venerable Hillel. These classes for higher pupils of the law met in some of the Temple rooms or colonnades, the teacher on a dais, and his scholars seated in a semicircle before him. Any pupil or hearer might, if he wished, put questions. Jesus simply takes a place among the pupils and in eager interest listens and questions. But there was a strange precocity

evident, a wisdom and a keenness never before met with in one so young. Those who heard "wondered at his understanding and his answers."

This, then, is early interest in religion. For religion with Jesus was a matter of absorbing interest; it was, indeed, the enthralling centre of His thought-life. Might not religion hold this place now? Should not a nation's youth be found at this Christ place—the place of religion—with eager and questioning souls? People talk about the necessity of "making religion interesting." But religion is interesting; religion, presented and taught in a manner befitting its greatness and beauty, never fails to hold youthful minds in the grasp of its nameless spell. Let youthful souls go for themselves to the Bible and the Gospels and the Christ, and they will be amazed at the interest which attaches to Divine things, and which Divine things awakens. When the field of religious thought and experience is disclosed, a wonder-world opens which widens out into the glory of the infinite. We may be well assured that our religion is of little use to us unless we are interested in it absorbingly and intensely, unless it has the dominant power over the

attention of our spirits. But when the soul's interest in it is awakened, religion brings everything else of worth with it. "Seek ye first," said Jesus, "the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

## CHAPTER VI.

# THE JORDAN AND THE WILDERNESS—AWAKINGS AND DECISIONS.

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With the exception of the Temple interlude in His thirteenth year, the whole of Jesus' thirty years' residence in Nazareth is a complete mystery. It was usual among the Jews that a son should follow his father's trade, and there is no reason to suppose that was otherwise in the case of Jesus. Indeed, we are told that the people who heard Him on one occasion said, "Is not this the carpenter?" The secret history of His soul during these hidden years is, of course, a profounder mystery still. Even conjecture here must be solemnly reverent. One thing perfectly evident is that the supreme interest of Jesus was in the deeper things of God. And He seems to have had—it probably grew steadily and mightily upon Him—a very clear and full—indeed, an overmastering—conception

of the spiritual function and destiny of His nation. Vague thoughts and feelings may have risen in His mind that He Himself had something to do with the real fulfilment of the mission of Israel to the world. Nor would it have been strange to find such thoughts and feelings even in one so lowly. The Jews were among the most democratic of peoples, and any man, from any grade, who had a spiritual message was received and honoured. A herdsman or a carpenter might be a prophet.

What concerns us, however, is the emergence of Jesus to publicity and His place in history. We shall never know whether, when Jesus left Nazareth to receive the baptism of John, He realised that His departure was final. Probably He did not think of the matter at all. Jesus did not "ask to see the distant scene." He but obeyed His call.

The immediate occasion which drew Jesus from the obscurity of Nazareth was a great spiritual movement in Israel, pulsations of which had penetrated to the upland valleys of Galilee and reached His heart. This movement was inaugurated by John the Baptist, the greatest figure of his age, next

to Jesus. John was, we are told, of priestly descent, and strange portents are alleged to have attended his nativity. As the son of a priest, John would probably be destined for the same office, but the supreme Spirit impelled him in another direction, and he became a prophet. Great thoughts and impulses stirred him, and he felt called to utter a mighty prophetic cry to his people. "The hand of the Lord was upon him." A crisis came in his development, followed by a sudden break in his manner of life. "Spiritual powers and instincts, long unknown in Israel, began to make themselves felt in this young man's life, and he went forth into the desert to be shaped in solitude into a prophet mightier than Elijah or Isaiah." After a stay in the Judean desert—long or short, but probably prolonged—John emerged with his message, robed, as the prophets were, in camel's hair garment bound with a leathern girdle. And before long the thunder of his preaching shook the land.

What was borne in upon the mind of John was that the long-expected Messianic kingdom was at hand, and that due preparation for it was necessary. Messiah must have a prepared people, penitent and ready for the

new life, and John's message therefore was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But he was also a stern moralist, and repentance with him became practically related to particular cases of wrong-doing, as we see from his words to the various classes who asked him what they ought to do. As a symbolic accessory of his ministry, John used a form of baptism. Possibly there was a threefold basis for this. Frequent washings, symbolising moral purification, were common among the Jews. Then when Gentiles were received into the Hebrew community, a certain ceremonial washing or baptism had to be undergone. Besides, there was the prophesied cleansing which was to take place when Messiah appeared: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you." Whether based on these or not, the rite, as John administered it, had a new and powerful significance. It meant the renunciation of the past and the expectancy of the new.

The voice of prophecy had been silent in Israel for two hundred years, and the thrill of it drew Jesus with the crowds to John. Possibly because he knew something of Him already, more probably because of a spiritual perception which revealed who this was who

came seeking baptism at his hands, John, on the appearance of Jesus, recognised a greater than himself, and therefore manifested a marked reluctance to perform the rite. And here one is struck by the singular humility and sane far-sightedness of Jesus. He does not think Himself too good for the baptism of John. If He is going to enter upon a vaster work than John's, He must do so through the way of the great spiritual work which God was then doing. Jesus is going to transcend and supersede John, but He must go to His mightier mission by the way of John's baptism. Jesus will not neglect, nor will He hold Himself superior to, the Divine movement which was, at the time, the manifestation of the eternal power and goodness. God was working, and Jesus would put Himself under the influence of the spiritual operation of the moment. Thus, and only thus, He will pass to become the agent of larger and diviner things.

This is the point which meantime must be very carefully noted. Jesus comes to the knowledge of His mission and to His ministry by availing Himself of the stimulus and impulse of a religious revival then in progress. That was, He felt, of God ; it was God's present

and immediate way of working, and therefore it became Jesus to advantage Himself of, and share in, the movement, the question as to whether He needed the baptism of repentance or not, being out of account. "Suffer it to be so now, for so it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," He said to John. In these studies we speak, so far, in human fashion, and humanly, yet reverently, speaking, one is constrained to believe that if Jesus had absented Himself from the baptism of John He would not, and could not, have come forth as the Christ. It was by the inspiration of this moment that He came to a full knowledge of Himself and of that to which He was called. The moral is very plain. When great religious agitations are evident, when there is a deep and widespread public interest in religion, when there is a distinct and real religious influence at work on the life of a community, no earnest person can afford to stand aside without risk of loss. At such times as those of John the Baptist at the zenith of his power and influence, there are strong influences drawing our souls towards the sacred stir. Other influences combine to hold us back. Our pride grasps us, our sense of self-righteousness asserts itself, our feeling of

self-importance holds us aloof. We, well-living and correct people as we are, do not need to concern ourselves about anything of this sort. That attitude is fatal and false. To keep back from any great religious manifestation may mean the missing of that which is of the supremest spiritual importance in one's life. Those who fling themselves into the flood find their true selves as they lose themselves, find their real mission as they forget all else. Men like the late Henry Drummond and John Watson came to their life-work and mightily affected their generation, because they came to, and were taken up by, a mighty religious movement which, in their young manhood, swept the land. And these are only examples of the great of God who came thus to a diviner life and to a realisation of themselves and their calling. No one need hesitate to follow where Jesus led. If He thought it meet and right to seek the baptism of John, we need not hesitate to seek to whatever is plainly of God, and which as plainly leads men to a better life. If we keep back, we may miss the true life and our mission; if we go, we may find both.

The wilderness episode follows naturally on the baptism experience. At His baptism, as

the story runs, the Holy Ghost came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." That is to say, Jesus, in the act of baptism, seems to have had a spiritual revelation. It is generally believed that up to this time Jesus had not realised that He was the Messiah, or Christ. Vague thoughts and premonitions may have been floating in His mind, and He probably felt, as all men feel who have been called to anything great, that something waited. But it was apparently at His baptism that the knowledge of His Messiahship, or Christhood, fell clear and full on the soul of Jesus. Up to this time He knew that God was His Father. He entered the water with that knowledge; He came up out of the Jordan with the knowledge that He was the Father's Son and the Christ.

"And immediately he was driven of the spirit into the wilderness," going, as St. Luke tells us, full of the Holy Ghost. This awful place to which Jesus went is that appalling region of verdureless and waterless desolation which reaches from the uplands of Judea to the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley. It is a place of bare crags and wild ravines, of utter

solitude and silence. Jesus goes there to be alone, to be, as the record puts it, "tempted of the devil." Without going into the history of the temptation interlude, it may be sufficient to say that Jesus, overwhelmed by the new consciousness of His destiny and mission, went away alone to settle His soul and determine the way of His future. Of course, suggestions came to Him from the sense side of His being and from that part of His being which lay open to the influences and inducements of the world. That is what the narrator evidently means when he speaks of Jesus as "tempted of the devil." For our knowledge of the temptation experience we are indebted to Jesus Himself. What His disciples tell us He must have told them. And it is very apparent that the accounts of the temptation given us are simply condensed abstracts. They outline a class or series of tempting suggestions which must have crossed and recrossed the mind of Jesus many times during those six weeks of solitude. There is perceptible evidence in the story, as we have it, of a triple temptation. Jesus is assailed on the sense side: "Why not use your power to feed yourself in your hunger?" But Jesus refuses to use His Divine

power on His own behalf; it is a trust, committed to Him to be used on behalf of men. He is assailed on the side open to the natural human propensity to ostentation or display: "Cast thyself down, triumph by making people see how immune you are from danger." And He is tempted to compromise: "Use worldly means to further your kingdom. Obey the world-spirit so far, and all the world is yours." But Jesus emerges from the desert victorious over all that, His way clear and His mind made up to take it to the end. He has decided on His path. Out of temptations come decisions.

This, the retirement of Jesus at the outset of His task, has its counterpart in all earnest lives. God's chosen must order the way of their beings alone with their own souls. If we come to our true selves we have the wilderness experience, for we find that we must settle our souls and make our decisions. We must go to the solitudes, though that may only mean retiring into ourselves. What are we going to do, how are we going to live, how shall we fit ourselves into the life of the world, and how can we best do our Father's will? These are the questions that face us at the hours of spiritual vision and impulse. Probably

Jesus did not see all His way before Him—even to the Cross—when He left the wilderness with a settled soul. One thing was sure—the Father asked His will and life, and all that was His. And Jesus came out to do the will of Him who sent Him. For us there is nothing else to do. Let men fling aside the suggestions that prompt them to choose the easy, swift, and most untroubled roads of service. We are tempted sometimes to choose certain ways which, if not the highest, appear to lead quickly to divine ends. In the face of such temptations let men ask clearness of vision that they may see through the specious arguments of their own hearts. No way but the highest way leads to what is divine. If a plain message comes to us from the story of the Christ temptation, and therefore as from Christ's own lips, it is this—Decide, when the hour comes when alone you must determine yourself and your future under a new spiritual impulse and knowledge, that the one thing you shall do is your Father's will as He reveals it to your spirit. Then you can never be at a loss. For in some way He will declare His will, and that is to make your path plain.

## CHAPTER VII.

# GALILEE AND THE LAKE—CHRIST AND THE CROWDS.

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### GALILEE AND THE LAKE—CHRIST AND THE CROWDS.

From the various narratives we gather that on emerging from the wilderness residence, which followed immediately on His baptism, Jesus again joined the crowds assembled about John the Baptist at the fords of the Jordan. There, we also infer, one or two of the disciples of John attached themselves to Him with the approval of their master. Very shortly afterwards Jesus returned to Galilee, performing His first recorded miracle at Cana. The Galilean visit was evidently short, Jesus returning to Jerusalem for the Passover.

Information about the next few months is scanty, and the Judean epoch of the early ministry is very much in the region of mystery. It is probable that for a few months Jesus associated Himself with John in his work, and then began a career of

independent activity in Jerusalem and Judea. We are left to infer, however, that His work and teaching made little impression. Only in a few cases was interest roused, the most conspicuous of these being that of Nicodemus. A spirit of fierce bigotry inspired the scholars of the capital, while the priests were Sadduceean worldlings. Under such influences the southern population, naturally more fanatical than that of the north, offered no favourable soil for the pure and spiritual teaching of Jesus. In fact, the attitude of the leaders and people alike became suspicious and hostile. So He left the city for the north, by way of Samaria, the incident of His interview with the Samaritan woman by the well of Jacob and the consequent brief mission to the Samaritans being interludes of the journey. Except for brief visits, Jesus did not go back to Jerusalem. He could do no more than weep over the city and die there. Henceforth the chief scene of His labours was sunny Galilee and the cities grouped round its lake. There the greater part of His life-work was done.

Galilee was just the field for the labour and service of such a life. It was a bright open land. Jerusalem on her hills stood aloof and apart from the lines of traffic. But Galilee

lay open to the world. The land was crossed by the principal trade routes from east to west, and there was a dense population, very cosmopolitan in its character. A semi-circle of towns lay about the central lake, and there was an extensive traffic. Indeed, the lake, now so silent, was the scene of a vast and bustling industry. Jesus, then, goes right into the heart of the world. He will do His service, He will speak His gospel among the crowds.

Here He found a more appreciative and responsive people. The Galilcans, from their intercourse with a larger life, were more open-minded, less bigoted, and quicker to hear than the Jerusalem Jews. It is significant that the disciples of Jesus, who became the heralds of His gospel and the founders of the kingdom, were, with one doubtful exception, Galileans. And it was the Galilean crowds who hailed Him with shouts when He went, for the last time, to a passover at Jerusalem. But the main matter to be noticed is that Jesus seeks the crowds. If He is going to do service among men, He must seek men. Therefore, His graciously sympathetic heart sought out the masses who needed what He had to give. Jesus was not a recluse to whom men had to

seek. "The son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." And, as we read, He lived a very simple and natural life among the men of Galilee, living in their dwellings, eating and drinking what they had to give Him—with ever a sympathetic eye and hand for their needs, above all, with a burning desire to bring the gospel of life into their hearts. Jesus fulfils Himself, does His mission, and proclaims His gospel among the crowds.

His work in Galilee had different aspects or phases. He exercised a healing ministry, He taught, and in privacy He instructed His disciples. We learn that, for a time, He had great popularity. The multitudes thronged Him wherever He went, and the fame of Him surged over the land. But Jesus shared the fate of many of God's great who work among the crowds. In a sense the bringer of any mighty gospel is before his time. He and the people among whom he labours are in different thought and spirit worlds. Jesus and His hearers were very much at cross-purposes, since He had thought only for the spiritual and aimed at spiritual results, while their notions were predominatingly material. They sought Jesus for physical healing or for

bread, but He wanted to heal their souls and give them the bread of life. Their thought of Jesus' future was of a great world-ruler bringing temporal good and prosperity, while, as He knew, His kingdom was not of this world. And it became apparent, after a time, that the people did not understand Jesus. It therefore became necessary for Him to make the true nature of His mission very plain. And from that hour His popularity waned. The crowds left Him, and in sadness He saw them go.

But Jesus would not accommodate Himself to popular notions or lower His gospel to suit the conditions of His age. He had fought the matter out in the silences of the desert, and for Him nothing approaching compromise was possible. So He withdrew Himself to a considerable extent from the people, and concentrated His efforts largely upon the instruction of His chosen and proved disciples. Now where Jesus was His disciples were found afterwards also, and there they are found to-day. And their experiences are often the same. A Christian life must be fulfilled, can only be fulfilled, among the crowds. Only there can the healing, help, or comfort be given which the highest humanity longs to bring to men. Christ's follower is where the Christ chose to

go—among the crowds. There we have a gospel to proclaim by life, if not in words. We have our great spiritual conceptions, impulses, and ideals, and our visions of what the will of God is for human life. To us alone the things that are eternal appear infinitely the more real and desirable. To these high things the Christian is faithful as he does his service. When people succeed in being living Christians, their kindness, helpfulness, and sympathy become known, so that the Christian enjoys a certain amount of popularity. But it not infrequently happens that this popularity has embarrassing results. Men are asked to take up responsible positions, and there is a temptation to use one's popularity for personal ends. No Christian will shrink from duty. If he can serve by taking responsible places, he will. But he will not take advantage of public favour to further anything less than the cause of the Divine ideals. There is also a temptation to accommodate when one learns the attitude and spirit of the crowds. Unquestionably this temptation is very real. "Why," temptation whispers, "should you attempt to sustain these lofty ideals in the face of the world as it actually is? Cannot you be a good Christian, cannot

you do better work for the world and wield a wider influence, at the same time doing more immediately practical work for the world by suiting yourself more to the public taste? You will succeed better and quicker that way." Ah, but the true Christian sees that any success won by lowering ideals and methods is no real success, and cannot last. Better a little done on the few in the line of the loftiest truth, than an ephemeral success obtained by sacrificing anything of the highest. Let men be true to the best, and in the long-run the best triumphs. And as the Christ had, so His followers have, a vast compensation. The best and purest souls gather about the faithful who will sacrifice nothing but themselves. To these pure souls the noble and holy can disclose their hearts, and thus the worthy are won for God and truth and the eternal causes. And even if our Galilee shows small gratitude for our service and little response to the gospel by which we live and which we are not afraid to declare, it is even so best. Best for ourselves, and in the long-run best for the world which we have learned to love with Christ.

# CHAPTER VIII.

# TYRE AND SIDON—THE LARGER WORLD.

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### TYRE AND SIDON—THE LARGER WORLD.

The object of Jesus in making this journey to the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon was partly prudential. He was, for a time, consulting safety, and therefore the interests of His as yet unfinished work. The sure end was becoming perfectly apparent to Jesus, but His hour had not yet come. There was danger to Jesus from two quarters mainly. Herod Antipas, in whose territories He had been working, had become alarmed and uneasy, fearing that the famous prophet might be none other than John the Baptist risen from the dead. But if disabused of this idea, there was risk that the irresolute and yet vindictive Antipas might attempt violence of some sort, especially as Jesus could no longer count on the support of the crowds, with whom His popularity was declining. But there was also danger from the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. As yet

they had not been able to fix upon any word or act of Jesus on which a charge against Him could be founded, but they were on the watch, and their spies were in Galilee, as He was well aware, dogging His steps everywhere. So Jesus finds it better to leave the district altogether for a short time, having, probably, the additional motive that He still had work to do upon His chosen twelve. Therefore He takes them away to comparative remoteness, going for an interval outside Herod's jurisdiction and that of the Jews. This is what has been called "The first journey of flight."

The ancient kingdoms of Tyre and Sidon lay north and west of the land of Galilee on the coast. Jesus and His disciples would reach the verge of the territory after two days' steady journeying. Coming down at last through one of the valleys from the bordering heights, Jesus and His band would look down "on the smoking chimneys of the glassworks of Sidon and the dyeworks at Tyre, on the long rows of warehouses filled with the merchandise of the world, on the mansions, monuments, and public buildings, palaces and temples, of the two cities and their harbours and moles crowded with shipping." "It was the land of the Canaanite, the seat of the

worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, which had so often corrupted Israel—a land of exquisite beauty, and yet so depraved and polluted that the Jews had adopted the name of one of its chief idols—Beelzebub—as the name of the prince of the devils." Thus Jesus, so far as the period of His ministry is concerned, is now in contact with the life outside of Israel. He is in touch with the larger world.

Very apparently it was not the intention of Jesus to do any sort of preaching or teaching work in that neighbourhood. He had come for quiet and retirement. We infer that He did little more than cross the border of the territory, and that He did not enter the cities, though on this latter point we cannot be quite certain. In point of fact, Jesus was shunning observation, and His journey to Tyre and Sidon was not in the least intended to be of a missionary character. But when Jesus touches the larger world He is still the Christ, and proves Himself to be the Christ.

For a cry comes to Him. Scarcely has He arrived until a suppliant appeals. News of who the stranger was had in some way leaked out, and a distressed woman sought Him on behalf of her child. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David," she pleaded, "my

daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." It has been pointed out that in the case of this seeker Jesus is specially in touch with the larger world. Various nationalities converge in her single personality. The woman was a Greek in religion, a Syrian in tongue, a Phœnician in race, and one of a people under the suzerainty of Rome. The Gentile world is in a manner summed up in this suppliant.

The attitude which Jesus took to this suppliant was unusual, and is therefore perplexing. It is so unlike that which He always held to appealing need. At first, it would seem, He takes absolutely no notice of the woman's beseeching, then vouchsafes only a curt word of refusal, and, finally, after a brief colloquy, appears to yield to a persistence which will take no denial. There is something strange here. And the explanation, when we seek it, is probably in His own words to the pleading seeker: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

In all probability the ultimate response of Jesus resulted in His leaving the district sooner than He had intended, in order to avoid the attention and commotion sure to be caused by the miracle. He sacrifices Himself. And we cannot look for the secret of His attitude

in anything in Jesus Himself, for He was ever responsively merciful to misery. We turn, therefore, to His own explanation of His reluctance to respond in this instance. Not that we at first find our way plainer even in this light. Christianity is a world-wide religion, and we wonder why Jesus did not respond without hesitation to an appeal from the larger world, and seek to make His power and influence felt there. But it must be remembered that the greatest movements must, as a rule, commence in well-defined centres, and must be confined within well-defined limits. The aim of Jesus was to win adherents in His own nation—the nation which stood in the direct succession of revelation—and thus the world. He must win and train those out of Israel who shall evangelise the whole earth. He must plant in the minds of men the conviction that He, Jesus, is God's Messiah, and this conviction, strengthened by its connection with the death which He is about to die, will send out the heralds of the Gospel armed with the irresistible message of salvation through a crucified Christ. In other words, Jesus sees that He will quickest save the world by confining His work within Israel, even though this means

His death, for by persisting in this mission His very apparent failure, His very death, will but give power and eternity to the new Gospel. Therefore He is reluctant to abandon this method in the face of a single case of outward need. He feels Himself, for universal humanity's sake, sent meanwhile to Israel only.

The principle involved prevails continually and in almost all noble causes. Many men, in whose hearts lie great schemes and enthusiasms, realise that these will be best fulfilled, not by a manifestation to the world, but by concentrating effort on a limited circle, and thus infusing the members of it with the knowledge and devotion which shall make them its herald missionaries. For the most part the greatest work in the world begins like this. Kept within narrow limits until it obtains a hold, it then spreads and grows great. Sometimes a seedling must be carefully nursed in a small vessel before it is put out into the space where it shall become a strong tree. Jesus saw His kingdom first as a grain of mustard-seed, and then as a vast growth, but His business was to plant the seed in the soil of prepared Jewish hearts, for Israel had the foundation preparation from which the de-

veloped Gospel springs. And it is well for us to ponder this, because the truth is of immense practical significance. Not a few people have very elevated ideas and ambitions. But circumstances confine them to a narrow sphere; they cannot go out to the larger world, they cannot give themselves to the wide places of social service. Indeed, the wise may come to understand that for the very work's sake they must repress themselves and concentrate their effort. Perhaps some fine enthusiasts have failed because, instead of seeking to make disciples, they went out at once to the world with a message for which the world was not prepared. Most of us are in a hurry; we lack the patience of Jesus and His wide vision of the ultimate issues inevitable when truth is once rooted in the earth. It may be well at first to infuse others with enthusiasm and to teach a few the truth, that the truth may widen immeasurably. Let no soul be discouraged because the bounds of action seem circumscribed and ready hearers few. Almost certainly God's work is in the long-run better done because some have to concentrate their efforts within the circumference of a small circle. A man who feels that a contracted

sphere of work is all that he can look for may take heart. If he is faithful he may have the vision of Christ, and may come to know that his is a mighty work, even if at the cost of sacrifice and pain of the repression of noble impulse, he too must in some manner say, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But the case of this pleading woman may be looked at in another light. It is a revelation of how Jesus affects the larger world. We must not be deceived by the apparent harshness of the recorded language of Jesus when He speaks of casting the children's bread to the dogs. For the word which He uses is a Greek diminutive, which literally means, the little dogs, or the pet dogs. He was not speaking of the wild, ownerless creatures of the streets, but of the household pets. Possibly by the very use of the word He gave the woman an opening which she was not slow to take, for she returns His word: "Truth, Lord, but the little dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' tables." In truth, when Jesus went to the larger world He went as His own winning self, He went with His own sunny look and gentle bearing. The woman felt that here was one with whom

she could argue and plead. "It was not a haggard, burdened, unsmiling man that encouraged an unknown woman to feats of faith like this, but one who met smile with smile, one who looked so strong and spacious, that even the most inestimable benefit seemed to those who saw Him like an unconsidered crumb out of His abundance." There was an impression of grace and fulness and power about Him which encouraged and won and rewarded faith.

George Macdonald says somewhere, "With that the thought of God came into my head, and it seemed as if I had a right to call upon Him—I was so miserable." This, one thinks, is just how Jesus appeared to the Syro-Phœnician woman. And this is a vision of Him which profoundly affected the larger world when He afterwards was preached to the Gentiles. There was an impression produced of vast gentleness and infinite resource. People felt as if they could well appeal to Him. This attitude of the seeking woman is typical of the attitude of the larger world to Jesus when it has a true vision of His gracious being. And that is how Jesus would have the larger world see Him still. He did not go to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon with the intention

of making any appeal to the larger world, but He carried there the impression of Himself. If Jesus is truly presented to mankind, this is how He appears always. What the world needs is a sight of the Son of Man as He went about the world with His "Divine regard"—full and great and gracious. For want of this our prayers lack faith and persistent force. His aim is not accomplished until men and women, weighed with the burdens which He only can relieve, see Jesus as one to whom they can appeal and with whom they can plead. The larger world needs that vision of Jesus, and if the man to whom it has been given can but give it again to only one tired soul in all the great world, he shall not have lived in vain, for he shall not have failed to do the will of the Father in heaven.

# CHAPTER IX.

# CÆSAREA PHILIPPI—FINAL CONSECRATION.

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## CÆSAREA PHILIPPI—FINAL CONSECRATION.

When Jesus retired with His disciples to the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi, He had passed the zenith of His fame in Galilee. For about a year and a half He had been working there almost continuously, making, in the course of that time, only one or two brief visits to Jerusalem. He had at first enjoyed great popularity. But the persistent efforts of the emissaries of the Jewish authorities had by this time sensibly affected His influence. Turned completely against Him, the authorities at Jerusalem were bent on His death. At the same time Jesus had largely lost His popularity with the Galilean crowds, owing to His persistent refusal to accommodate Himself to their materialistic Messianic notions. Whenever the people realised that His aims were purely spiritual, they went back to their own teachers, who

taught that the Jewish race were the chosen of Heaven and the predestined heirs of the visible and material Messianic kingdom. Now, every great soul has a quick sense of the tone of public opinion, and can discern very clearly how things are moving so far as he is himself concerned. Jesus at this stage plainly knew all, and was clearly aware of how matters were tending. In fact—and He knew it—the crisis of His life had come. And with the overpowering realisation of the crisis came, naturally, the desire for escape for a while from the bustle of the crowds. Jesus would be away for a little from all the stir, struggle, and opposition to quiet His soul and gird Himself for the final ordeal. Therefore Jesus and His disciples came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi.

In one way this was a journey of flight and Jesus a fugitive. He was not safe, at the time, even in Galilee from the agents of the Jewish leaders. Not that that circumstance would of itself have been sufficient to take Him away. His hour had not yet come, and He was very well aware of when that hour would come. There was another purpose in His going. As yet Jesus had not taken His immediate followers into His closest con-

fidence. Very carefully and patiently He had been teaching these men and instilling the truth concerning the kingdom of God into their minds. Hitherto He had not examined them closely as to their beliefs about Himself, but the time had now come when He must ascertain how their thoughts were running and how their spiritual life was, under His guidance, developing. Would they be able to stand the test of being the followers of a crucified Messiah, once they understood that the founding of the kingdom meant His death? And could He trust them to carry on His work after He had gone? So to be alone with them Jesus takes the disciples away to the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi.

But as regards the personal significance of this period of retirement for Jesus Himself, the truth seems to be that He wanted quiet in order to face out the situation and assume His final burden. He must be alone with the few and in the recesses of the hills, where no distractions from the world could come, in order to look facts squarely in the face and gird Himself for death. Jesus is about to make complete consecration of Himself to the clear will of His Father, and He goes to the silences of the mountains to offer Himself

up. He had crucified Himself at Cæsarea Philippi before they crucified Him at Jerusalem. Jesus was always consecrated ; but that which passed at Cæsarea Philippi when He calmly made up His mind to accept His lot to the uttermost, was—final consecration.

We may not enter the most sacred secrets of the Christ's experiences in the quiet of the valleys among the foot-hills of Hermon when He was preparing His soul for the ministry of death. But, in all reverence, we may gather that He looked at matters full-front. Such things as personal thoughts and ambitions did not exist for Jesus. The cause of the kingdom and His Father's will mastered His entire being. From the first He had consecrated Himself, and now the final act of consecration came, which meant that, rejected by the world, He must offer up His life that the kingdom may triumph. How, then, does all this apply, and always, to Christ's own ?

Let it be borne in mind that Jesus begins His career with one fixed resolve. He sees the glory of the kingdom, He believes in the goodness and blessedness of the Father's will, and He dedicates Himself utterly to the service of the kingdom and to that holy will.

Now that is how every true follower of Christ begins his career in the world—as a Christian. It is not necessary to ask, or to attempt at this point to answer, the question, What is it that makes one a Christian? But there can be no question about this fact, that a Christian is one who has an intense conception of the reality of the truth which Jesus proclaimed, and who has made up his mind to be loyal to that truth and obedient to the will of the Father as that is revealed to him by the circumstances of life and experience. That is the one thing which is to every genuine Christian perfectly clear. We have many interests and engrossments, and we do well to be faithful to them so long as they are right and pure. But at all costs we must be loyal to the truth which Jesus taught us as to our duty to God and our fellow-men and our relation to the will of God. We too have consecrated ourselves to God and the diviner service. Whatever happens we must be faithful to the highest things. So far as these are concerned, there can be no compromise anywhere.

Well, then, with that consecration, with that resolve, the Christian goes out to face the world. His mind is made up for the truth

and for God. Now the Christian, as he goes through the world, will find that if he succeeds in living as a Christian, he too shall enjoy a certain amount of popularity—so long as his Christianity does not bring him right up against anybody's prejudices or interests. A Christian-minded person is, as Christ was, sympathetic and brotherly, kindly and forgiving. A Christian-minded person is, when opportunity offers, among the sick and poor and sad. And the world will take as much of that kind of thing as you like. More, the world will greatly appreciate and applaud Christianity when it runs into these lines. But just here there emerges a certain risk. People make, in another and modern form, the mistake which the crowds of Galilee made. They look largely at the material and temporal side of things; they think that Christianity should concern itself mainly with the social well-being and earthly happiness and comfort of mankind. So far, of course, Christianity does, but in a secondary sense only. Certainly Christianity must manifest itself in Christlike actions, but Christianity's first business in the world is to bring men to a new life in God. That being accomplished, all else follows. If by his attitude a Christian makes it clear that

he does not regard Christianity as a mere charitable institution or a scheme for social betterment, if he insists that the first business of the Church is with the soul and not with the body, with the implanting of ideals and not with the actual creation of social Utopias, he may find, and likely shall find, that his popularity as a Christian suffers eclipse. People are impatient often with that which is concerned first with the soul. There is a certain hostility against the Church in many quarters for this very reason. You will be applauded and made much of while you are manifestly a Christian so far as active helpfulness, kindliness, and charity are concerned. But make it quietly and yet firmly evident that that is not the first business of Christ or of His follower, but that the aim of the Gospel is spiritual, make it evident that Christ's message amounts to this, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," and see what happens then.

In this way it may come about that Christians have to face a certain situation and make up their minds how they shall act in the presence of a certain crisis. Will they take the popular way and allow their Christian activity to run mainly into social

material lines, or will they keep the spiritual in the front while not forgetting the material? This sort of ordeal often comes for Christian workers and reformers. Not all Christians may have to face this test. But a Christian may come to a point when his position as a Christian must be made perfectly clear to himself and to others. A man finds, not infrequently, that one course of conduct only demands his higher obedience. His own natural inclinations and interests draw him one way, but fidelity to the truth and to the will of God draw him in another direction. As a rule, the will of God is revealed by the providential circumstances and crises of life. It came home to the Christ partly through His realisation of the fact that He had not won the crowds to His spiritual gospel, and that if He remained faithful to that He must die. For us our faithfulness to Christ and to God's will may mean the facing of a situation which implies sacrifice—the sacrifice of prospects, of ambitions, of some cherished hope. That situation does not always arise—it often does arise. For the consecrated soul that is almost always the hour of final consecration. We too may have to go to our Cæsarea Philippi and face the matter out. A decision has to

receive the consent of our heart and will, and that decision may affect, and permanently, the whole of our future conduct and all the rest of our lives. But if it becomes plain to the spirit that the difficult way is God's way, then that way must be taken in lowly and surrendered trust. From the faithful soul final consecration may be asked, and it is the crowning act. But in the act of final consecration there is peace. Self is buried and the soul has rest in the love of God and in the assurance that "the world passeth away and the lust thereof, while he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

# CHAPTER X.

# HERMON—TRANSFIGURATION

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### HERMON—TRANSFIGURATION.

In our last study we were occupied with final consecration. Transfiguration follows on that, and follows naturally.

We fix Hermon as the probable place of transfiguration. It is well known that the traditional spot associated with this supreme event is Tabor. But the earliest transfiguration narratives of the Gospels say that it occurred on "an high mountain," and that the scene was enacted in solitude. Now Tabor is not "an high mountain," and in the time of Jesus, solitude there would have been impossible, as the summit was occupied by a garrisoned fort. Then Tabor is a long distance from Cæsarea Philippi, and the narratives seem to indicate that the transfiguration experience passed near that place. On the whole the most probable theatre of this heavenly scene is Hermon, the "goodly mountain." Its

summit is crowned with almost perpetual snow, but the accounts do not require us to believe that the event happened on the topmost peak, but rather on one of the spurs or upper slopes, and in the late night.

As one might expect, the details of the Transfiguration are given us merely in outline. This is inevitable, for the narratives are attempts to describe the practically indescribable. What we gather, however, is that Jesus, taking only the select three with Him, ascended the slopes of the mountain for the purpose of drawing near to His Father in prayer. That He expected such an experience as the Transfiguration is not to be inferred from the accounts of it, and is not probable. If transfiguration were anticipated it would not occur, for the element of self-consciousness precludes anything of the sort. The essence of transfiguration of any sort is that it is unconscious, coming upon the transfigured without his seeking, and therefore without his anticipation. Resuming the abstract of the story, however, Jesus' disciples, we are told, tired and drowsy, fell asleep, to be awakened by the sound of voices. Looking up they beheld the gleaming form of a transfigured Master, and with Him, talking, two upon whom was the sheen of

paradise, and who were, as they recognised or afterwards ascertained, Moses and Elijah. As to the appearance of Jesus, we gather from the various narratives an impression of unearthly brightness. "His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as light." "His raiment became exceeding white as snow." "The fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering." All this gives the idea that the face and form of Jesus took on a new and celestial aspect as of intensely pure white light. He shone before the three, burning and not consumed. It is, of course, quite impossible for us to fathom the explanation of a phenomenon so transcendent as this. All that we can know is put for us in these fine words: "An inevitable hour is upon Jesus." Knowing it, He, according to His wont, restrains not the inevitable, but seeks solitude and God. He spends the night in prayer. In the light of His people's destiny, in the face of His prophetic forerunners, conscious of a deeper need and a more desperate struggle than theirs, He presses His life closer to God's, reaching out after perfect sympathy and closer understanding of His purposes and of His own part in fulfilling them, and receives in return that

wonderful and beautiful inflow of life which stirs up unfathomable springs of purity within, and transmutes even His face and form. It was as when in the sunlight, peering into the heart of a gem, we see depth opening beyond depth, until it looks as if there were no end to the chambers of splendour that are shut up in the little stone, flake after flake of luminous colour floating up out of the unseen fountain which lies somewhere in its heart. In that high hour Jesus knew Himself.

This much, one may venture to say, is plain enough, that the shining appearance of Jesus at the moment of transfiguration was not probably by the shining of a light from heaven upon Him, but by the shining from within outwards of the unseen spiritual glory of His own being as that was touched and strengthened by His close communion with God. His inner being glows out through His flesh until His very clothing gleams. The mystical flame of heavenly life within burns through the transparent vase of the mortal body. It is the revealing triumph of spirit over flesh.

As regards the significance of this event for Jesus, it probably is the sublime consummation of that long process of self-discovery which began in His career, how and when we do not

know, but which is evidently stimulated into intensity at His baptism. But in all likelihood His self-knowledge grew, and He became more and more conscious of a secretly luminous life of which His disciples as yet knew not. This transfiguration hour is the hour of perfect self-realisation.

In that hour He learned also His task to the fullest. He saw the uttermost that His Father's will required. But because there was neither doubt nor hesitation in His soul, a very rapture of conscious exultant power seemed to possess Him. "He was uplifted with radiant energy, and experienced a joy full and deep and solemn. The sweet and awful gladness of His consecration fills His heart and shines out of His face. The Transfiguration, in this aspect of it, was the Divine defiance of the coming darkness."

Does, then, this transfiguration scene bear any personal and individual experience for us? Even in this excelling experience is the disciple as his Lord? For there is something apparently exceptional and supernatural here. Now take this whole question of transfiguration. That there is such a thing among ourselves is well known. Transfiguration is a psychological and physiological fact. But,

unhappily, transfiguration is not always of the same sort, not always divine. The dominating element in all of us is the inward mystery of the characteristic mental life. And this flesh of ours is a strangely plastic and responsive element. Our inward thoughts, moods, feelings, and emotional phases reflect themselves in our faces and shine through our eyes. Even the form betrays us. Sometimes we are erect, firm-stepping, and alert; sometimes the muscles relax, and we visibly droop and bend. So the face is sometimes dull, and sometimes full of light; expressions flit across it as reflections flit over the surface of a still lake. The light within gleams through the veil of the body whether the light be lurid or holy. How many of us would be able to bear the sight without a shock if we saw ourselves in a rage? The sight would be a convicting revelation. Cases are known of people who were startled into stronger self-control and a better regulated life through having caught a glimpse of themselves in a mirror when under the impulse of a mood, passion, or impulse by no means holy. But the converse is also true. Note a man or woman at some hour of supreme devotion or dedication. Those who have resolutely made up their minds to some

act of heroism or sacrifice which means danger to life, or the almost sure loss of life, stand out transfigured in a new and strange dignity. People who see them hardly know them, so changed are they. Even homely apparel seems to fall into the folds of royal raiment; the simplest garb takes sheen or majesty from the power born of the exaltation of the moment which alters face and body. When what is holy, or tender, or great within us is stirred to its fullest, the glory of it shines through and irradiates the whole being. What was Stephen at his martyrdom but transfigured when those beholding him saw his face as it had been the face of an angel? If we ever felt or thought nobly or divinely, our fellows saw us in a manner transfigured. We were above our ordinary selves.

If an hour of final consecration comes for us, transfiguration of a sort will follow. As we discuss our real selves and our tasks in the communion with God to which our final consecration impels us, there will be that visible which tells of the peace and power and joy within. Transfiguration hours come, at all events, for all of us. They do not last; they are too intense; mortal flesh cannot long sustain the supremest spiritual exaltation.

Reactions and depressions may follow. For Christ the valley of Gethsemane came not so very long after the mount of Transfiguration. But the memory of Hermon was a light in the darkness of the garden, and it shall be so with us. Last of all, there is, perhaps, in transfiguration a hint of the future : "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." When the spirit is perfected the spiritual body shall bear the glory of the spiritual. That, possibly, is part of what is told us when the seer says that he beheld the redeemed all white-robed as they stand before the throne of God. They are white within, and the whiteness shines through, and blends with the light of the Eternal Light.

# CHAPTER XI.

# PERÆA—THE PAUSE.

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### PERÆA—THE PAUSE.

In this study of the Christ places it is necessary to take, in some instances, a comprehensive view of large sections of our Lord's career. Especially is this so in the particular instance now to be dealt with. The study must embrace the last few months of Jesus' life, and it is a time crowded with discourse, action, and incident. In fact, considerable sections of the Gospels—especially of the Gospel of St. John—are accounts of the events of this period.

A swift sketch of the historical outlines is essential as a preliminary. After the Transfiguration at Hermon, Jesus returned for a short time to Capernaum. At this time He avoided publicity and gave Himself largely to the instruction of His disciples. To this period belong the story of the visit of the Temple tax-gatherers and the miracle of the coin in the fish's mouth. Soon after

Jesus went up to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of Tabernacles, but "secretly for fear of the Jews." The events of this period are narrated in chaps. vii.–ix. of the Gospel of St. John, from which we gather that both by word and work Jesus attracted attention, and also deepened the hostility of the Jewish authorities, who made a futile attempt to arrest Him. In this connection the spirited defence of Jesus before the Sanhedrin by Nicodemus is memorable. The exquisite interlude of the sinful woman brought to Him for judgment possibly occurs at this time. Jesus then returns to Galilee.

About the month of November, Jesus, knowing that His time was drawing near, finally leaves Galilee, with pathetic and unforgettable words of condemning farewell. His evident intention was to go southward by Samaria, but His discouraging reception there made Him turn aside and take the route to the east of Jordan. It was apparently His purpose to spend some time in active work in the eastern district, for, as we read, He chooses seventy out of His followers to go before Him and announce His coming. Then He journeys slowly through the Peræa towards Jerusalem, teach-

ing and healing on the way. It is at this time that Jesus, on being asked by His disciples for instruction in prayer, teaches them the "Lord's Prayer," that infinitely comprehensive heart of the Church's devotional inheritance. So He goes southward, arriving at Jerusalem for the Feast of the Dedication some time in December. His home at this time was at Bethany, in the household of Lazarus, who with his sisters, Martha and Mary, had become the deeply attached friends of Jesus, we know not when or how. After a short residence in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, Jesus, to escape arrest, retired to a place called "Bethabara beyond Jordan," which cannot now be identified. It probably belonged to the Peræa, and in the Peræa Jesus spent the remaining months of His life, His residence there being broken only by a swift visit to Bethany, when urgently summoned there by the news of the sickness of His friend Lazarus. After the stupendous miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Jesus passed to a village called Ephraim on the wild borderland of Judea to the north-east. Thence He went again into the Peræa, to emerge at last for the inevitable end.

This district is the long strip of country lying on the eastern side of Jordan, opposite to the territories of Judah and Samaria. It embraces the ancient lands of Moab and Ammon, and the ancestral lands of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. The Peræa was part of the dominion of Herod Antipas, and is a narrow belt of country leading up from the Dead Sea to a point almost opposite the Sea of Galilee. It is a pleasant, fertile, and well-watered land, and at the time of our Lord was thickly populated, the inhabitants being largely pagan, though there were, of course, many Jews also. This district was the main scene of His activity during the last few months of Jesus' life.

This stage of Jesus' life may be called "The Pause." Let us approach the significances of it. It is a pause of several months between the departure of Jesus from Galilee and the end. And it must be borne in mind that during this period Jesus is perfectly aware of His approaching fate, and is living, so to speak, in sight of the Cross. But His object in remaining away from the neighbourhood of Jerusalem is that He may be in comparative safety until the appointed hour. He

does not wish to precipitate matters, and meanwhile courts retirement, removing Himself from imminent risk at the hands of the Jewish authorities. Many men, under such circumstances, would have forced matters. We can imagine a man of a certain type of mind as resolved, once that he knew what was coming, to bring matters speedily to a head. Not so with Jesus and the souls who are patient and wise. Their implicit message to us is, "Never seek to hurry things—take God's way." Forcing of catastrophes is fatal; unripe action defeats its own aim. Every career has a natural development, and so has every movement, and one who is clear of soul is shown how the process is tending, and how and when it must fittingly close. Let a man do his work and wait until events develop—to accelerate a crisis is seldom wise. Under God's guidance matters shape themselves for God's own. Naturally there is often a temptation to premature consummating of things. But the wise of God resist that temptation. "He that believeth shall not make haste." The devoted and holy see what is approaching for them often enough; but they wait God's time. Let no man either rush on or flee from what Heaven

wills for him. Let him wait for that, and when it comes he can face it out.

Further, it must be carefully noted that this, the pause of Jesus, is not a period of inactivity. It is the very opposite. This is a pause full of action. During these three or four months Jesus was as busy about His Father's business as He ever at any time had been; He was even more intensely busy. He was not merely "marking time," but ceaselessly active. A glance at the speech and work of this period reveals a very marvel of wisdom and might. Besides the resurrection of Lazarus, there are in this period also the healing of a man with dropsy and of ten lepers. To this time also belong these supreme parables, the "Lost Sheep," the "Lost Coin," and the "Lost Son." Here also we place the incident of the young seeker with great possessions. In fact, we observe about the work and speech of Jesus at this time an increased power and depth. The very consciousness that His time is short seems to give Him a strangely additional might. Those miracles of the Peræa pause are mighty. On a previous occasion we hear that He healed a leper by a word; here at a word He heals ten. On two former occasions He had raised from the dead those who had

been but a few moments or a few hours out of life; at this time He brings back one who had been dead four days. As to His words, one has but to read the story of the "Prodigal Son" to see that the soul of Jesus, now utterly consecrated and baptized for death, had a new depth and strength, so that His utterances had a power, an insight, a searching, appealing beauty unique and unapproachable. Wonderful as His earlier words were, yet those of the Peræa time take us to higher heights and deeper depths. Now this is always the effect which such periods have on the finer spirits. Their approaching fate, instead of unnerving them and producing a sort of lethargy, only serves to intensify all the energy of the great, and to draw out from them something fuller, finer, and grander than they have ever before uttered. Tennyson's soul was near the infinite sea when he sang "Crossing the Bar," and he sang nothing more lovely, nothing more profound, nothing purer than that. Always the sunset of great lives is full of glory. The pause comes for not a few lofty ones of God. Not infrequently it happens that these know how matters are about to issue, and what they may expect at the hands of the world. But the living passion within them for the great

causes to which they have devoted their lives impels them to strenuous service to the very end. One believes, *e.g.*—to take a ready illustration—that Gordon in Khartoum never was so busy or so devotedly earnest as during the last few weeks there when he knew that he was practically doomed. Mazzini toils for Italy even when he knows that Italy will not meanwhile respond, and that he must die with his dreams unrealised. For some of us perhaps the pause may come. We may see that something for which we have consecrated ourselves is not going to succeed openly in our time, and that our own careers in that service are near an end. We may have to look ahead to a time when we must take what comes and leave the rest to God, leaving all to Him with our "videat Altissimus" (let the Most High see to it). But the "pause" need not be a time of lassitude and depressed inertness. Better to go on doing what we believe we are sent to do, until, by unmistakable events or circumstances, God bids us cease. For what men do under the solemn urgency of that time, when all that is noblest in them asserts itself with added power and intensity, must be of priceless value in coming days, whether the work

done be by example, or word, or strain of toil.

Further, let it be observed that at this period Jesus is not deceived by signs of apparent success. All that He does and says is done and said in full conviction and view of the swiftly approaching catastrophe. For a time in the Peræa He had what looked like a revival of His former popularity. Great crowds followed Him, and He roused widespread enthusiasm. At Jerusalem, even, the raising of Lazarus had the effect of turning the popular tide in His favour. But Jesus was not deceived. He knew how ephemeral that agitation was, and how little it really meant. Often towards the close of their careers outstanding men have a similar experience. Lord Morley, in his *Life of Mr. Gladstone*, tells, *e.g.*, that just before that statesman experienced a reverse which meant the shattering of his policy, his meetings were never more crowded. The enthusiasm which attended his appearance was as tremendous as ever, yet the general election went against him. Almost invariably there are beneath the surface of public life great currents of influence at work which tell in given lines mightily. The powers that count are often

quiet, but they are there. Jesus knew that there were influences and forces, practically all-powerful, operating against Him, and that these were determining His fate—that, in point of fact, they had determined it already. All the ferment He had raised was powerless to hinder what was coming. It is these strong, silent, unseen things that really matter often. Popular commotion may be like froth driven before the winds, but the mighty forces of the great interests and antipathies are as strong and deep as the relentless tides—sometimes. We have to watch, and dread, and combat the strength that says little, but works quietly and makes itself felt everywhere, backed as it is by wealth, position, and authority. Forces like these bide their time, but often they get their way in the long-run, though in the ultimate issue God is stronger than they. Men in earnest on the side of the good must not be deceived if there is for them a flare or flicker of seemingly renewed success in their path of action. We must be sure that such a thing is no passing gleam, but real, and truly indicative of helping might behind. If real, nothing can stand against it; if only a brief excitation, it is as evanescent and ineffective as a swift aurora light on the

northern sky. Let men work on and rate their measure of support, if they can, at its true value. A spirit in touch with God is strangely illuminated and knows the truth.

For His great workers God often sends "the pause." But it may mean neither inaction, depression, nor defeat. If the faithful and true must pass through a pause like that of Jesus, let them, if they have a word to speak and a work to do, speak and work while they may. Such steadfastness and unweariedness in well-doing can never be in vain. We have learned almost the first lesson of life when we have learned how to labour on, caring little what happens to ourselves provided that the eternal cause prospers, rating at their value the applause and support which we receive, and always very sure that even the work done towards the close, and under the approaching shadow of the night that cometh, is eternal, and shall have eternal results—though men who see but a little way may think otherwise—if the work is done in the name and the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

# CHAPTER XII.

# JERICHO—CHRIST ON THE THOROUGHFARES.

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### JERICHO—CHRIST ON THE THOROUGHFARES.

We have seen that the last three or four months of Jesus' life were spent for the most part in the Peræa, the district east of Jordan. This period we called "The Pause," since it was the time in which Jesus waited for the inevitable end of His earthly career, though it was a pause full of activity. But it comes to an end. The time of the consummation arrives, and Jesus turns His face to Jerusalem. He goes openly by and through Jericho, and as we regard Him now we see the Christ on the thoroughfares.

More or less He was always there. But this is the supreme and typical example. For Jericho lay deep down in the great Jordan Valley, where it widens out into a small plain near the head of the Dead Sea. At this point roads and passes come down

from Gilead and Moab to the Jordan, and the river being crossed, the traffic went by the great main road over the plain and through the city of Jericho. This town stood, therefore, right across the great southern trade route. Jericho was, in fact, the gateway of the extensive export and import trade between Judea and the lands east of Jordan. Hence it was a busy, wealthy, and important commercial place, and consequently a large staff of customs collectors—publicani—were stationed there, the head of whom was a certain Zaccheus. There are certain places which, like Jericho, have their importance from the fact that they are on the main lines of trade. Liverpool, for example, owes its prosperity to its position as the principal entrance to Britain, and therefore to the continent of Europe, for the transatlantic traffic. Then the business of the world goes largely through London, and much of the might and influence of the city are due to this. To mention these places in connection with Jericho is to compare great things with small, of course. But yet in this way we are helped to understand the important place which Jericho had in the ancient eastern world, and to realise why,

when the Christ passed through Jericho, He was going on the thoroughfares.

We can follow in fancy the progress of Jesus up to and through Jericho. Coming from the Peræa by one of the passes, He and His followers ford the river and join the main road. About seven and a half miles away lies Jericho. And the white road lying under the intense heat down there in the valley shows a strange medley of movement. Throngs of foot-passengers on their way to Jerusalem to the feast trudge along in the dust, lines of loaded camels and asses jostle the wayfarers, merchants, drivers, drovers, and pilgrims move and mingle, and the whole scene is one of animated bustle. As they draw nearer to the city the throng becomes denser, and the traveller is in the heart of a great and active life. He is in the midst of the tides that have flowed along the roads of the world from time immemorial.

Two interludes of Jesus' progress make it memorable and the description of it more graphic. Where the flow of life is fullest we often find those who are in distress or need, and who sit appealing to the passers-by for help. To a greater extent even than with us this state of matters prevailed in

the East. No public provision was made for the helpless, and they took themselves for charity to the roads and streets. It is characteristic, therefore, that as Jesus passed by there was, just outside the city and at the roadside, a blind man sitting, uttering his plaintive mendicant call. Hearing an unusual commotion, he asks the reason, and, on hearing that Jesus of Nazareth is going by, the thought of the one vast want and disability of his life leaps uppermost in his mind, and his great cry for help pierces the noise and reaches the Christ's heart. For the blind man it was good that Jesus was on the thoroughfares that day, for light came to his long-darkened eyes at last—perhaps also better light into his darkened soul. How lifelike also after all these centuries is the incident of Zaccheus. Here is the case of one in whom the appearance of Jesus roused an interest deeper even than that of a consuming passion for gain, so that the man leaves his post and runs to look upon the famous teacher and healer. We can fancy, too, the scene at the business man's comfortable dwelling in the residential quarter of the town, where the wondering guests listened and the curious crowds out in the brilliant sunshine peered in through the open

doors, and where Zaccheus received a new vision and began a new life. When Christ is on the thoroughfares He is still the Christ, as He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

But take a larger and broader view of the theme. Here is Christ on the thoroughfares. He does not shrink aside into less frequented and obscure ways, but goes with the flow of life and into the very heart of the work and movement of the world. He goes by the thoroughfares as we all do, as we all must. No man can shun them unless he wishes to shun life altogether, no wise man seeks to shun them, no earnest man can shun them. Christ's follower must go where Christ leads. As we go to duty and to destiny we go by the thoroughfares of life. With his own strange insight Bunyan sees this truth. The dreamer brings Christian and Faithful to Vanity Fair. There was no escaping the city of Vanity. It lay, Bunyan says, with one of his consummate touches of genius, "right across the way." The Christian must go through the world, and be the Christian there.

Let it be also borne in mind that Jesus, though He had no part in the traffic and trade that poured through Jericho and in

all the commercial activity of the place, was not out of sympathy with these things. Evidently, indeed, the reverse is the case. Jesus had certainly other graver and more wonderful work to do; He was but going through Jericho to offer His last sacrifice. But we make a mistake if we think that He held Himself aloof, with the ascetic's disregard and disdain, from all the keen, warm, strenuous life about Him at Jericho. There was not about Jesus a trace of the spirit of aloofness which one sees, for example, in the Hindu devotee who walks the highways or the streets of cities, in total indifference to all that goes on there, as if he were the inhabitant of another world. No, the Christ is there where trade is moving and surging, there, interested, sympathetic, and observant, not of the world in which He is meanwhile walking, but yet in touch with it, and with an eye and a heart for it all. He saw how men worked and struggled, how strenuous the strain of business life is, how much men have to tempt and try them there. And that must be His attitude if the Christ is to help the world. It must be, indeed, the attitude of every Christian. Even men who are of the more sacred profession, even men who are

devoted to literature or art, must know the mighty flow of trade and be in close, sympathetic, and intelligent touch with those who carry on the business of the world, if they are to be of any real and effective use. The bulk of our populations are found on the thoroughfares. And those whose lot is cast in those places know their peculiar trials, temptations, and discouragements, and what special grace and help are needed to keep life honest, straight, clean, and gracious. To be in the working world, and yet to be true to Christ and the Christian ideal, is the task of most men. It helps us mightily if we realise that the Christ knows what we need and is close to help. He was on the thoroughfares, and because He was there He knows what we require to keep us faithful to Himself and His gospel even there. If we seek He will show us that between business and religion there is no "great gulf fixed," but that religion may be unobtrusively in and behind the traffic and trade of the world, so that even on the thoroughfares one is still Christ's and in fellowship of spirit with Him.

Let it be further noticed, however, that when the Christ is on the thoroughfares His presence and influence there bring people to see

that there are larger, purer, finer, and diviner things to be thought of and sought for even than those the pursuit of which engrosses the toilers. When we are on the thoroughfares we are apt to be narrowed. Work is so engrossing, competition so keen, that a man has little time for attention to anything else than that which brings him to the thoroughfares. Yet weary need and heavy hearts are not far away, and the Christ, when on the thoroughfares, works a physical miracle on the blind man, and a spiritual miracle on Zaccheus, perhaps to show us that the diviner spirit and power of a Christian man should be observant and operative even where the tides of business flow. It may be possible to have some wise care even there for those whom one sees stranded helplessly where life is busiest, poor wreckage flung to one side by the inexorable and stern tides of practical life. One thinks of others also. Go down to the densest parts of London or any great city at the busiest hours. And in the eager, hurrying throngs the careful observer will not see among those evidently engaged in business one very old man, one cripple, or one disabled person. All are more or less vigorous, active men. They have to be; that is no place for any but the

able and strong. Then one asks, Where are the others? Where are the weak, and failing, and feeble? Is there anything of significance for them in this rushing life—anything which shall ultimately flow towards and bless them? Nor is this all. One wonders whether those keen, alert men on the thoroughfares of life know and live there by any other law than the iron law of business which they know. Have they wider principles of charity, consideration, forbearance, and helpfulness controlling their doings? Let a man know that when he is on the thoroughfares he need not be the less efficient or less successful if he keeps a tender heart for the world's need and misery, and keeps the clean, pure soul that has as its first law the law of righteousness and as its controlling principle the unselfish spirit that thinks for others' good as well as for one's own. We are meant to be on the thoroughfares, and we are meant to be Christlike there. It is there the supreme test of a soul's worth is made, and it is there, most of all, that the life is lived and the deed done whereof the Master shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . thou hast been faithful, . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

# CHAPTER XIII.

# THE TEMPLE (III.)—THE OLD AND THE NEW.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE TEMPLE (III.)—THE OLD AND THE NEW.

THERE is something strangely sad and memorable about the last visit to any place of which one must take farewell. This is more especially so if the place is one which is endeared by any sacred significance or long association. When we have to go wistfully over old scenes, knowing that we shall look upon them no more, ours is an experience not to be forgotten. To go for the last time through the rooms of a house in which one has lived for years, and where one has undergone some of the deeper experiences of life, to take a familiar walk which shall not be taken again, to sit in the pew in the old church before sailing over wide seas to far lands, most people know something of one or other of these experiences and of what they mean. Witnesses of the scene tell us that they can never forget Mr. Gladstone's last

night in the House of Commons. He spoke in a great debate with something like his old fire, and then, business over, rose from the Treasury Bench, and, passing quietly behind the Speaker's chair, walked away from the House of Commons for the last time. He had addressed it for the first time sixty-one years before. Few in the House knew what had really happened. But he knew, though he made no sign.

Such things happen continually. But the most meaningful of them pale before the incident which we now have to consider—the last visit of Jesus to the Temple. He had been taken there as an unconscious infant some thirty years before, He had gone in holy gladness to His Father's House when He was a youth, on one visit He had in fierce and righteous wrath at its profanation cleansed it with a scourge, He had worshipped and taught in the hallowed courts, and now He bids it farewell for ever. On the Tuesday of that supreme week in the world's history Jesus spent the whole day in the Temple, and at evening went slowly down the marble stairway which would be the place of His feet no more. On the Friday evening He was dead.

This, the Christ's last day in the Temple, was, as we learn from the Gospels, full of memorable incidents, among which were His controversy with the scribes and Pharisees, His terrible denunciation of them, and His commendation of the widow's offering, whose giving of her all to the treasury chests He had seen with those eyes that saw all things. But the most solemn and significant history of that day is not written, because the story of it was enacted in the secret places of the Christ's soul. What He felt as He trod the once sacred place for the last time, and then left it for ever, what His thoughts and emotions were as He contemplated the final abolition and overthrow of what He once held dear, shall never be told. These things lie in that Holy of holies—the unknowable sanctity of His Spirit.

But, taking the Temple as the Christ bids it farewell and speaks its doom, one is impressed by the profound significance of His attitude towards the place so dear to Himself and to His nation. At this point we see the old and the new together. That is the old which Jesus is leaving behind Him. The new is—Himself.

We must bear in mind that when Jesus

declares the approaching destruction of the Temple He is very far from speaking in a spirit of anger or utter repudiation, but only announces the inevitable. Naturally the words would fall stunningly on His disciples' ears. They would not know what to make of a statement so utterly opposed to their most cherished traditions and beliefs, for as yet that which was most sacred in their religion centred in the Temple and not consciously in their Lord. That third Temple of Judah, which stood there in its pristine freshness after a work of construction of about fifty years, was a very magnificence of marble and gold, and the joy and pride of the Jews to the ends of the earth. To be calmly told that the superb pile where their God dwelt would ere long be flung into ruin, was to receive startling and amazing news. One doubts whether the disciples really comprehended Jesus' words; more than likely they thought that He spoke a parable. But He saw what must be, and He literally meant what He said.

There is always a love in our minds for what is venerable and hallowed by the sacred associations of centuries. Then, besides, people have a natural disposition to regard as permanent and incapable of extinction any

institution or form which has in the past produced fine and exalted types of character, or in which some of the noblest souls have found full and sufficient expression for their religious life. But when we carefully study religious history, we certainly find that there is in religious form a tendency in two directions: (1) It is apt to become more elaborate and involved. Solomon's temple was a small and comparatively simple structure, Herod's a vast, costly, and showy pile, while the worship of Solomon's temple was a much less developed and complex affair than the lengthy and intricate ritual of the later ages observed in the time of Jesus. Just in the same way creeds tend to become longer and more detailed. Israel's earlier legal system ultimately evolved into a mass of legislative minutiæ, and, to take a later instance, the simple and stately confession of the Scottish Reformed Church was replaced by the bulky Westminster Confession of Faith. Similarly the worship of the Church of Rome is the cumulative result of ages. Then (2) as religious institutions and externals grow more elaborate and ornate, they tend more and more to become formal as to adherence and observance. The ancient cathedrals of this and other

countries are a tremendous advance architecturally and æsthetically on the plain and unadorned meeting-places of the earlier days. But with advance in these directions there is frequently a corresponding decline in spiritual fervour and in the reality of the religious life. And thus

> "The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

For, as in all life, so in the religious life of mankind, there is a law of evolution at work. Religion tends to become wider and more purely spiritual. This process goes on simultaneously with the elaboration of creeds, forms, and institutions. For a time there is no open and apparent conflict. Holy souls who are growing into the larger truth, or in whom it burns with a phenomenal and exceptional intensity, find that the old form, rite, and place are still in a manner sufficient to express the new truth or to hold it, and to satisfy the aspirations and longings wakened by the new vision. But this state of matters cannot last. The breach must come some time, and it is usually made by the one or by the few. Generally the mass are content

with the old. But the one or two who have the new light and truth realise at length that they must have something larger than the old form. Denounced often, and condemned as heretics and innovators, they see that the old must go, and they are firm to their convictions at all costs. They understand that even the most venerable thing, though hallowed by the associations of centuries, must pass because it has served its purpose, and now, so far from furthering religious advance, rather stands in the way. A time comes when the Christ or the Christlike must say even of the last and most magnificent embodiment of religious life, "Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be one stone left upon another that shall not be thrown down."

Now that is what is happening in the scene before us. This is the new pronouncing the passing away of the old. That splendid building was a marvel, a very blended loveliness and grandeur, and its destruction could be but contemplated with a sigh and an inevitable regret, but it had to disappear. Jesus loved the Temple dearly. Much of what was precious in His own life was associated with that spot. It was the centre of the religion of His race, the sacred place round which the

religious history and tradition of centuries had gathered. It is not, indeed, saying too much to say that the dust of it was dear to Him. He was jealous for its purity with a great jealousy. But in spite of this Jesus saw that in the course of the Divine movement of redemption, and in the interests of the growth of a world-wide religion, the Temple must pass away. Not even a purification would suffice, not even a transformation of the house into a place of spiritual worship. There must not be "one stone left upon another"—there must be absolute obliteration; the old must utterly vanish. Religion must be emancipated from hampering and marring form. There must not be for the world, now to be brought into the new kingdom, one central place of worship, one place of special religious privilege. Neither in Gerazim nor Jerusalem shall men worship the Father. Nothing must distract man's soul from the truth that God is a Spirit, and that they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth; nothing must distract man's mind from the supreme truth that the true Temple of God is the human soul, and that that only, in the fullest sense, is the Holy of holies of the Tabernacle of God which

is with men. So not in any spirit of vengeful iconoclasm, or not because of any denial of worth which once was, and which still in a measure remained, Jesus quietly contemplates and announces the end of the Temple, now not far-off. This is but the calm acquiescence in the passing away of the old and dear of one who sees the splendour of the coming of the new. The day of the Temple is over, but the dawn of the day of the Spirit has come for the whole earth.

The new was in the Christ Himself—was Himself. Now and henceforward the centre of true religion was to be no human house, but the Christ, the Son of the living God. He stood for all that is eternal and spiritual, the living centre where God and man meet. His redemption proclaimed, His truth accepted, His spirit reproduced mean—religion. Jesus "was the kingdom — He was the religion: everything lay for ever in His character and His love." The old fades and disappears, all that is of worth and vital in it surviving and carried over into Christianity. In all this there is a perpetual message. But there is a special message for this age and for every age in which, as in this, religious form and belief are changing. There are those who

regret and resent change of this sort, and those who welcome it as alike necessary and full of promise for the future. Change there must of course be, for religion is an evolving spiritual vitality. As man evolves religion discloses its further reaches, possibilities, aspects, and glories. Our older Christian creeds tend to become intellectual fetters, and the plainer worship of our fathers does not meet the want of the growing soul for full and beautiful expression. Yet let no man repudiate or belittle the past. Jesus did not. The religious beliefs and forms which past generations loved may not be those which we cherish and observe, but we cannot forget that they nourished great men to a great religious life and character. The sterner creeds, the simpler worship of other generations, made strong and holy souls. Still a time comes when we can do nothing else than acquiesce reverently in the passing of the old before the new as the Christ fulfils Himself in the world and in ourselves. For change must be. In the opinion of some, it is not wise to attempt the renovation or restoration of the ruined abbeys and cathedrals of the past. Better that they should stand as they are—monuments of a bygone religious

life, carefully guarded and reverenced, while men give care to the embodiment of the new in saner life, better laws, purer conduct, more elevated Christian activity of thought and deed. But let us be very sure that before the old is left the spirit of it is embodied and incarnated in the new. It is not for us to say of this or that, holy, ancient, and well-beloved once, not for us to say of that in which men once found their souls satisfied, "There shall not one stone be left upon another that shall not be thrown down," until we are very sure that all that was true and vital in the old is carried over into our lives and reinforced there by new truth, so felt and cherished that we can diffuse it out upon the world. It was the Christ element in the Temple worship and sacrifice that gave these things worth, and whatever endures is of Him only. If we live in the new after the old has gone, that is Christ. If we bid the old farewell, the Christ goes with us as we go to the new—the Christ more fully, mightily, and blessedly. For in all advance we cannot pass beyond Him who is the everlasting way, and truth, and life, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

## CHAPTER XIV.

# BETHANY, THE UPPER ROOM—RETIREMENTS AND SOLACES, CONFIDENCES AND FAREWELLS.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### BETHANY, THE UPPER ROOM—RETIREMENTS AND SOLACES, CONFIDENCES AND FAREWELLS.

Among the many points at which the life of Jesus touches our own, one of the most attractive is His capacity for possessing and enjoying the solaces of personal friendships. It is a false conception which removes Him into a region remote from, or removed above, the ordinary human relationships. A Saviour incapable of having personal friends could not be a Saviour who hallows all man's mortal life. Jesus could love with a purely individual affection; He could have, and did have, His purely personal and private life, His purely personal and private friends. But they were few. Who were of fibre so fine that they could be attracted to Jesus or touch the rarer human feelings of His pure heart? Outside of the circle of His disciples only

three are named for us, and these only by St. John; when St. Matthew and St. Mark speak of Bethany, they make mention only of the house of Simon the leper. But St. John tells us of a household of three who were very dear to Jesus—Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus.

We are here merely in the region of conjecture, so far as details are concerned, but it is inferred that the family were orphans, and Lazarus the head of the house. Evidently they were fairly well-to-do people, with a comfortable home, and able to offer a modest but sufficient hospitality. When and how Jesus came to know and love them is a matter of pure surmise; Scripture is silent and tradition doubtful. When we see the three, they are the friends of Jesus. And the mention of them but lifts the veil for a little from that most holy place — the personal and private life of Jesus.

One thing is quite clear: There must have been on the part of these three a spiritual response to Jesus; and that response indicates the corresponding fact that theirs must have been souls of a noble and gracious sort. Like draws to like, and before there could have been this close intimacy between Jesus and the

three at Bethany there must have been a very real spiritual affinity. Mary has left on the world an impression of pure and spiritual womanhood so deep and enduring that she ranks only next to that other Mary, the mother, blessed among women.

What interests us is, however, the fact that Bethany gave Jesus what He sorely needed —the solace and retirement without which arduous and continued life in the high places is practically impossible. It is a striking fact that Jesus is not known to have passed a single night in Jerusalem—so far as the records of the Gospels are concerned. The air of the place was too dense for His free spirit; He wanted the open fields and the stars. When ministering at Jerusalem, Bethany was His home. To-day the place can be identified in a small village of five hundred inhabitants, a mile and a half from Jerusalem on the Jericho road. And it is one of the most sacred sites in the world; it is the place of the human rest of the Christ, the place where He experienced most of what comfort of human love He had after the burden of His awful ministry fell upon His life.

Now the priceless things of life for those who are called to strenuous tasks are just

those which Jesus the Christ found so dear—the retirements and solaces of earthly existence. It is natural that those which Jesus had should receive slight mention in the Gospels—should, in fact, be little more than hinted at. For these are the sacred things with which no one may intermeddle. Yet they exist always, and they are beyond price. When we read the lives of the great we find that the pages are full of the records of their achievements or their public work. But we know that behind the open busy life lies the secrecy of the retirements and solaces—there lie the home seclusion, the private friendships, the associations, the counsels and comforts that strengthen us all for the sterner side of being and for duty. No one can afford to be without these things. Life is poorer and work less strongly done if we have not those sweet and gracious things to cheer us and help our spirits to endure. What Jesus found precious we cannot dispense with, cannot despise. There are hours when one becomes tired of the blaze of publicity and the struggle out in the open. We must retire aside into the quiet to live for a little our single personal lives, and to have rest in those things that are all our own. It is something to feel that one

has a retired island of one's own, to which the world cannot come, set somewhere in the wearing seas. The world may call us out of it, the world does call us out of it, to struggle with the might of the tides and to feel the sting of the spindrift; but we keep the spot sacred from the world, and we go back. Nor is this mere luxury. It is the experience by which we refresh ourselves and become stronger for duty and service, and no wise man will neglect, or try to dispense with this side of life, for his work's sake and for his own soul's sake. We cannot give out to the world unless we take in from the eternal things, and we must have the retired private life to replenish our spirits. The Christ life must have its Bethany as the Christ had His.

In this private life of His the Christ had His solaces—the ministrations of love, the gentle attentions of careful souls, the sympathy of tender hearts. But let it be remembered that if we would have our retirements and solaces helpful and blessed, they must, as far as may be, such as were those of Jesus. We must find the best friends, we must let our souls draw us to those whose finer being knits them to the best in us, and who are in sympathy with our ideals and our diviner life.

The retirement of private life may mean more than simple repose. If so pure as to be helpful, it is not the less but the more restful and contenting to the heart. And, as we prize the solaces of life, let us not forget the souls who are bearing the burden of great tasks, and who are not so blessed as we ourselves are. Unless loving souls had given Jesus His solaces and retirements, these never would have been His, and there are those of His servants in the like case. Possibly we may encounter earnest souls who will lack those pleasant things unless we can give them, from time to time, the help and peace of retirement, the comfort and strength of solace. If we give what they need we do a holy thing. The Christ's work was better done because of that which the Bethany home afforded Him. And even if we do no more than rest and cheer the Christ-like, that will mean much for the kingdom of God. We cannot forget that not Elisha only, but all Israel, had blessing because of the kindness of the household of Shunem; we cannot forget that not Jesus only, but the world, received good untold because of the unselfish and devoted care of Lazarus and Martha and Mary of Bethany.

But now we approach a kindred place to

Bethany, and come to the upper room, the place of confidences and farewells. About this upper room there is a certain beautiful element of romance. To whom did it belong? Who was the "goodman of the house"? No one knows. All that is known is that the room was in some quiet street in Jerusalem. We can, however, at once see that Jesus would not, and could not, have taken the liberty of asking the use of a large guest-room from a perfect stranger. There is therefore a warranted conjecture—it is no more—that we here encounter one of the nameless friends of Jesus. As we read the biographies of great men we may take it that not all who affect and help their lives are named. Almost every man has his unknown, unnamed, and humbly self-obliterating friends. And we can gather that Jesus had not a few, never mentioned in the Gospels, who touched His life very closely all the same. Nicodemus was probably not the only disciple who was "a disciple secretly for fear of the Jews." If we read between the lines of the story, an inference becomes permissible that Jesus had a friend in the city whose house was at His disposal, that Jesus had made all arrangements with him about meeting there for the last passover, and

had even arranged the signal by which the disciples would know the right man. It would seem that even they did not know about the goodman of the house. Jesus told the disciples that at a certain place they would meet a man carrying a jar of water—an unusual thing for a man to do, this work being usually done by women. Following him to the house to which he led, they were to accost him with the question, "Where is the guest-chamber where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" Now all this gives the impression of preconcerted arrangement. So even in Jerusalem there was one who could be a friend of Jesus, a mysterious disciple whose name the world has never heard and never will hear.

So sheltered Jesus and His disciples gather in the upper room. It is supposed to be the rendezvous of the disciples after their Lord's death, where some of His post-resurrection appearances were made, and where the Spirit came. But we regard the room mainly as the place of confidences and farewells. That took place there which made the spot for ever hallowed in the disciples' memories. This was the last occasion on which Jesus and the Twelve met together under the old conditions.

All the familiar companionship was over. In a few hours the terror and horror of the end would come. Beyond that lay the beginning of a new and spiritual life of communion with an invisible Lord. Therefore the time and place were peculiarly solemn and memorable. Jesus on this occasion opens His heart more freely and fully to His disciples than on any other. He is about to leave them, and leave them, moreover, to great and trying work in His kingdom, and there is therefore much to be said about what they would have to do and bear, and concerning the truth which they were only beginning to understand. Necessarily Jesus had to say a great deal which is only said at such a time as this. The last confidences and charges of those who are passing from us have always contents and a significance unspeakably great. Much of what Jesus had to say at this time was beyond His disciples' immediate comprehension. But the future taught them. The confidences breathed in the upper room became plain, and were realised by experience in after-days when they had received the Holy Ghost. "They remembered his words."

Jesus here also utters what are really farewells. He and the faithful among His disciples

are about to part for a time, soon to be reunited in closer ties for ever. There could be no room for farewells in Gethsemane; the judgment-halls and the Cross could be no places for last words. Life's farewells are taken when there is a calm before the falling of the darkness. But what is to be noted here is the loving considerateness of Jesus. He does not allow the final catastrophe to fall abruptly on the disciples; He does not leave them without a farewell scene to remember fondly. It is thus that all God's great and wise act. When they know that for them the term of labour is over, they are careful to warn those who shall follow of what is coming as they bid them farewell. The soldier, the statesman, the thinker, the leader in the things of the kingdom of God, with vision cleared by the nearness of the end, do not fail to take their followers deep into the deep things of the life to which they are about to go, to warn of what is coming, to point the way, and to speak a word of cheer. Not a few men have felt their crown of consecration fall upon them, and have heard the truth which made them wise and strong, in the few solemn moments when the dear and great have given them their last confidences and communicated

their farewell counsels. In one other sense, perhaps, this upper room experience comes into our lives also. In our work for the kingdom of God the upper room has its place. Our religious life and service go from stage to stage. Jesus may take us into the retired upper room of our own souls, each one into our own inner thought-life, and there show us depths and meanings in Himself and in His truth which we have not before known. He will do so when we are on the eve of going on past the knowledge and experience of Him which we have had to other vision and experience—when we are saying farewell to the old before beginning the new. It is the Christ who is with us in the earlier stages of our religious life and service when we know Him but in part, and it is the Christ disclosed more than ever in His glory, His infinitude, and His excelling spirituality who is with us still when, having taken us into the secrets of His soul and parted from us as we knew Him once, He shows us Himself in even mightier reality and majesty as He goes with us still, the same, and yet vaster, to better and purer service.

# CHAPTER XV.

# GETHSEMANE—THE LAST ORDEAL.

"*Down shadowy lanes, across strange streams,*
*Bridged over by our broken dreams;*
*Behind the misty caps of years,*
*Beyond the great salt fount of tears,*
*The Garden lies. Strive as you may,*
*You cannot miss it in your way.*
*All paths that have been, or shall be,*
*Pass somewhere through Gethsemane.*"

## CHAPTER XV.

### GETHSEMANE—THE LAST ORDEAL.

In Scripture the garden takes a large place. Man is represented as coming to self-knowledge, and a knowledge of sin, in a garden—in a garden the second Adam, who came to free man from the weight of sin, fought His last fight, in a garden He was buried, and in the same garden He was seen alive at the dim dawn of the first Easter morning. We have to do at present with one of the named gardens of Scripture, that hallowed spot whose awful sacredness is only next to the sacredness of Calvary—the Garden of Gethsemane.

We gather from the narratives that after eating the last passover with His disciples Jesus and they went out into the dark streets of the city, and passed out by one of the eastern gates into the deep shadow of the Kidron Valley beneath the mass of Olivet. Down there a favourite haunt of His lay to

which He often went for quiet. To the Oriental a garden is a place of retirement. Its privacy is recognised and is stricter than that of the comparatively open Eastern house. One might walk freely into an Oriental's house without special invitation, but no one would have dreamt of entering a private garden uninvited. Such an intrusion would have been keenly resented. But, and probably because He was on intimate terms with the proprietor, Gethsemane was open to Jesus and His company at any hour. He had complete and uninterrupted seclusion there. "Jesus oft-times resorted thither with his disciples."

The name "Gethsemane" simply means "oil-press." Different terms are applied to the place in the Gospels, but the total impression is of a secluded spot surrounded with walls. No doubt it contained olive trees—if the enclosure was not, though it probably was, altogether an olive grove—and doubtless the garden contained an oil-press, perhaps also a house. There is a conjecture—which is no more than a mere conjecture—that the owner was Mary, the mother of John Mark, being some sort of suburban residence. In any case we infer that Gethsemane was situated east of the Kidron, and was regarded as belonging to

the Mount of Olives. Thus we have to think of Jesus as descending from the city into the valley, crossing the brook, and reascending a little on the other side. Nothing in the Gospels enables us to fix the site more exactly.

But tradition is more precise. From the time of the visit of the Empress Helena, in 326 A.D., the traditional site of the garden was fixed. It is a spot at the foot of the Mount of Olives, on the left bank of the Kidron, and some fifty yards from the present bridge. There are eight olive trees of great age in the place, though the legend that these were in the garden which Jesus loved is, of course, impossible. The Greeks have a garden adjacent to, but distinct from, that of the Latins, and the Russians have a church in the neighbourhood. Though uncertain, this traditional site is not improbable. But it is fitter that the locality should be left in the obscurity of uncertainty. Gethsemane is better loved in the soul of the Christian than the actual spot could ever be, and the literal detracts from the ideal.

When attempting in the course of these studies to show how the phases of the Christ history have corresponding phases in the life of the Christian, the task, in most instances,

has not been difficult. There was, of course, always the reserve. Jesus is the mighty exception, and any study of Him must leave room for the exceptional. Otherwise it is incomplete. The exceptional has, however, been reverently left aside, ground having been chosen on which one may go with surer tread. Now a theme emerges which leads us to a place where our footsteps falter. Yet in this case also the relation which has been hitherto traced is maintained, and we are with the Christ still. Gethsemane lies somewhere in human life almost always. That great scholar, Amiel, whose pathetic history is revealed only in his *Journal*, published after his death, in one passage says: "When a man can no longer look forward in imagination to five years, a year, a month, of free activity, when he is reduced to counting the hours and to seeing in the coming night the threat of an unknown fate, it is plain that . . . he must hold converse with himself—the one possibility which is his—till the end." In this, however, there is nothing akin to self-examination; it is not an act of contrition or a cry for help. It is simply an Amen of submission. "My child, give me thy heart."

"Renunciation and acquiescence," Amiel

goes on, "are less difficult to me than to others, for I desire nothing. I could only wish not to suffer; but Jesus in Gethsemane allowed Himself to make the same prayer. Let us add to it the words that He did, 'Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done'—and wait."

Let it be noticed, in the first instance, that as to this Gethsemane experience Jesus is in withdrawal from the world, and alone. He leaves the eleven somewhere at a little distance, takes the chosen three deeper into the shade with Him, and then leaves even these, going apart by Himself to pray. Here is one of the experiences of life which, in this respect, are not unknown by ourselves. There are circumstances in which we are compelled to be alone, because the burden upon us is all and absolutely our own. No one else understands, no one else can, no one may share. We must go aside into that most awful of all solitudes —the solitude of self with God. But these are the hours when one prays, for the other present is God. Hours come for us when we must be alone with God, because that has come for us which He only knows and understands. We are brought to a crisis where He only can help. And if such an hour ever

does come for us we are at the gates, at least, of Gethsemane.

But, in the next instance, this also is clear, that Jesus was "in an agony"—in a state of pained and perplexed perturbation of spirit. We shall not try to enter the mystery of the cause of this agony in its deeper aspect. Was it fear of death? Was it an experience of the weight of the sin of the world? Was it a horror at the darkness of the fate looming close ahead, and at the awfulness of the crime about to be committed? Or have we here some appalling experience of something unknown and indescribable which must come, in a concentrated intensity unimaginable, upon one who is to be the Saviour of the world? We do not know. Possibly all of these elements, and more, were present. But we leave this mystery where Scripture leaves it—in the darkness of the night and the olive trees. There we find it, there let the unsearchable sacredness rest, veiled.

Yet—this is the point to be next remarked—one thing is at least clear, namely, that in Gethsemane Jesus has to acquiesce and to renounce. And the acquiescence and renunciation mean a soul's agony. Here we see a little sombre light, lit by our own

experience partly, and we begin in a measure dimly to understand. Let us reverently try to think ourselves into the situation. Here is one who once had hopes of winning His nation for His gospel of the Father, and who saw these hopes die. Here is one who had hoped to be accepted as the Christ, and who is manifestly rejected. Here is one who hungered to save His people, and who has seemingly failed. All these things mean the abandonment of hope, the grief of disappointment, the frustration of a pure ambition, the apparently premature close of a career. The whole grim series of facts are compressed terribly into the imminent sense that He must die, and that horribly. This is the end of what seemed bright once. Of course, the soul of Jesus saw the great light beyond the darkness and the salvation that should be accomplished through the Cross. But with the pressure of the immediate burden upon Him the vision became clouded by the shrinking of the flesh and the natural feelings of the man. Thus both experiences—the vision and the fear—are combined in the one prayer, "Father, save me from this hour. Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

So we begin to understand faintly. We, too,

may be, probably shall be, perhaps have been, called upon to acquiesce and renounce. Almost always the experience means a bitter and heart-breaking ordeal, an untold pain. That, in a sense, is the hour of our Gethsemane. And it may come as a critical and supreme hour in a human life. A man will want to be alone then, and he will pray; nor need he doubt the reality of his faith and the worth of his religion if he, too, says in some manner, "Save me from this hour." One must make up his mind—it is a frequent ordeal—that some loved thing shall not be his. This has become perfectly sure. Yet his heart was set on it—set on it mightily. But circumstances, which often mean the expression of God's will, say all too plainly, No. What, when it is so, must one do? There is only one thing for a brave Christian to do. Let us go to our garden and meet God there, and let us abide in the garden until we, too, can renounce and acquiesce. There is a better for us and for the world in God's thought than that which we sought and for which we hoped—we may be sure of that at least. It is permissible and right that we should ask relief, but always in bowed submission to the Eternal Will. For in acquiescence there is peace.

Or, again, such situations as these may be for us. One may have to face the fact that he must leave the world before his life-work seems well begun, or may have to pray for the life of another, and realise, with a stricken spirit, that his asking is vain. And there is in cases such as these but the one refuge—the garden and the God who waits there; there is but the one path to peace—the path of the renunciation and acquiescence that try the heart. We are capable of these, any of us, if we have won the spirit of Jesus. The effort may tax our strength to the uttermost, but the sacrifice can be made, the surrender accomplished. If the hour comes it will not be altogether lonely. He who fulfilled His woe among the olives will not be far from us. He will not fail to watch with us through our one hour. "He slumbereth not nor sleeps."

Not infrequently, to take one other instance, a man may have to abandon some cherished ambition, some perfectly legitimate and even praiseworthy hope, some laudable aim. It may be shown him, with unmistakable plainness, that what he wanted to be and to do are not what shall be, or what must be done. His life must take another shape or go on other ways. God's plans are often furthered by the ap-

parent frustration of our plans and hopes. A man, for example, may well enough hope that recognition and promotion may come for him. He is fit for bigger things, and knows it. But the years pass and the bigger things do not come. At last the truth is driven in upon his spirit, that he must be content to remain in comparative obscurity and humility, that the greater things he hoped for are not to be his. When a man has to face that out in one intense moment of realisation, seeing his hopes fade and his dreams vanish, when he sees struggle and continued anxiety before him, the hour is bitter and dark. Yet he must renounce and acquiesce—only that way to rest lies open. He knows that the Father's will is best, but yet the weak flesh cannot help its cry, "Father save me from this hour."

Let these suffice. All who know life know that it has its Gethsemanes somewhere. Before we reach them there is one thing to do if we would be ready for the ordeal. Let us steadfastly live out our lives in the faith that God our Father has a great and loving will for us, and that that will is best—best for us, best for the world. If we live in the resolve that we shall obey that will, no

matter what the obedience of it means for ourselves, then we have an inward strength which will not leave our spirits, and the strengthening angel shall not fail us. Thus, if we are led to Gethsemane, we can enter it, and come forth again, and come out in peace. Jesus' struggles were practically all over when He left the garden. He had renounced and acquiesced. Thenceforth He was calm and, but for the one cry to His Father on the Cross, still. After we too have renounced and acquiesced, we are collected and quiet and strong for all that may follow. We have been in Gethsemane. And nothing can hurt our hearts grievously any more, nothing that happens to us can greatly matter after that.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE JUDGMENT-HALLS: MEN AND THE DIVINE MAN—CALVARY: THE PLACE OF SACRIFICE—THE PLACE OF THE TOMB: DEATH AND LIFE—THE MOUNT OF OLIVES: VISION AND ASCENSION.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE JUDGMENT-HALLS: MEN AND THE DIVINE MAN—CALVARY: THE PLACE OF SACRIFICE—THE PLACE OF THE TOMB: DEATH AND LIFE—THE MOUNT OF OLIVES: VISION AND ASCENSION.

It is familiar truth to readers of the Gospels that Jesus appeared for trial or examination in three judgment-halls. After His arrest in Gethsemane, He was taken before the Jewish High Court or Sanhedrin, which held a special emergency meeting for the purpose in the course of the night. Before this court, at which certain false witnesses gave suborned testimony as to His words concerning the Temple, Jesus was accused of blasphemy, of a violation of national law, and of having spoken depreciatingly about the holy house. A direct question from the high priest elicited from Jesus the calm asssertion that He considered Himself to be the Messiah,

and this single reply was held to amount to blasphemy and to be ground sufficient for the death-sentence. The court accordingly decreed Jesus to be worthy of death. But the power of ordering execution of the capital sentence was not now in hands of the Jewish authorities, and therefore as soon as morning had come Jesus was taken to Pilate, the Roman procurator, who was then in Jerusalem, that the action of the Jewish court might be officially confirmed. Pilate, after a brief investigation, saw that the prisoner was not guilty of any real offence, and proposed to release Him. Finding the attempt vain, Pilate endeavoured to elude the responsibility and embarrassment of the situation by sending Jesus to Herod Antipas, also at that time in the city, on the ground that Jesus was a subject of Herod's tetrarchy. But Jesus maintained before Herod a dignified and unbroken silence. Baffled thus, Herod, after the infliction of senseless insults, sent Jesus back to Pilate, who, compelled by the frenzied clamour of the mob and overborne by his own fears, at last gave reluctant consent to the Crucifixion.

Now the matters of significance here are these: that Jesus appears in three judgment-halls, and that in none of these does He make

any attempt at defence. Before the Sanhedrin He says practically nothing, simply reiterating His claim to be the Messiah; before Herod He is absolutely silent; before Pilate He simply throws the responsibility for the situation on the Jewish leaders, and speaks in private to the governor a few deep words which Pilate could not understand, though they moved and awed him. The Divine Man before men, "as a sheep before her shearers, is dumb."

For there are times when God's great must take up that attitude. For one thing, Jesus knew that to attempt defence of any kind was useless. That trial before the Sanhedrin was the merest farce and a travesty of justice. His death had been already determined upon by implacable enemies, and the trial was a simple covering formality. Jesus would not assist at anything so flagrantly wrong, but, as any pure-souled being in the same circumstances would have done, flung the whole responsibility on His judges, serene in the consciousness of His innocence, and leaving the issue to God. He knew that by simple submission He was doing His Father's will, as others who followed Him have known also, as we, too, may have to know when

opposition or dislike judge and test us in a bitterness that will listen to no reason. Better, then, to leave the evil-doers to bear the burden, in our calm sense of right, and let God look to the rest. When we are prejudged and condemned by unreasoning bigotry or hate, there is little left to do; we can only bear. It is not for us to give wrong a semblance of right by acknowledging a prejudiced tribunal based on falsehood. Wrong in the long-run defeats itself when left alone. Silence is not infrequently a true soul's only possible attitude and best defence.

The most interesting and important point in this connection is, however, that Jesus is silent because He is in all three cases before men who are utterly incapable of understanding either His position or Himself. The soul of the Divine Man is past the range of the thoughts of other men. Before men the Divine Man can only be silent. He can say no word which they can comprehend; they will utterly miss His meaning, they will not be able to follow the flight of His thought. What was the use of talking to those materially minded, bigoted, and fanatical Jews, to a callous sensualist like Herod, to

an ambitious and unscrupulous worldling like Pilate, about a kingdom not of this world, about a spiritual gospel meant for the whole earth, about a life of pure heavenliness, better than all theory, all rite, and all sacrifice. These men moved in their own narrow worlds. They were utterly disqualified from understanding Jesus; to talk to them even in the most convincing manner would have been utterly vain. In fact, Jesus' attitude in the three judgment-halls was simply a sublime carrying out of His own injunction to all His own: "Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine."

This has been the fate of not a few who have followed Jesus; it has been the fate of not a few of God's holy and mighty—in a manner and measure it may be ours. What is the use of defending oneself sometimes before the self-constituted tribunals of earth? If God has sent us some vision of truth, if God has given us some insight all our own, if we know that we are right, and know also that popular opinion is against us, what, at times, can one do or say? To make our position manifest we must use speech which those who hear us cannot fathom, or utter thoughts beyond the bounds

of their familiar conceptions. What we have to say may be received with laughter, sneers, or unreasoning anger. Defence of our position is practically impossible—we are dead up against a wall of impenetrable rock. Men even to-day know what it means to keep silent, simply because they know that it is useless to speak, simply because they know that whatever they might say would be heard by minds utterly disqualified to understand. There are judgment-halls in this world where men have to stand with closed lips. If we find ourselves at the bars of prejudice, or alarmed bigotry, or angered interests, and know ourselves to be advocates and exponents of unpopular truth, we may have to be as the Christ was. But to witness for the truth as the Christ witnessed is the surest way towards winning its victory. When a world which does not understand his words sees that a man is willing to stand silent, even to the last consequences, for what he believes, the world begins to pause and wonder. So in the end the truth triumphs. Jesus is silent in the judgment-halls—"There is no speech nor language: his voice is not heard"—yet His gospel has gone through all the earth, and His words to the end of the

world. The Christ, silent in the judgment-halls, is heard to the ends of the earth.

And now we reach supremely holy ground, for what shall one say of Calvary, the place of sacrifice? The long foreseen end came: the cross bore its burden—Jesus agonised to death. His ministry had been one long sacrifice, but this is sacrifice at its awful consummation, at its acme of self-surrender. Jesus is crowning sacrifice with the completeness of entire self-giving even unto death. In one sense Calvary is an inviolable loneliness. Experiences passed there in that solitary spirit which are known in their fulness only in the heart of Godhead. With bowed heads and hushed spirits we leave them there, our consciences bearing witness that even so "the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world." And yet Calvary is not an utterly lonely place after all. Others of God's great have had to climb that height, and face the terror of the darkness that lay about it once so heavily. Those who have surrendered themselves to God and His will may be called on to give themselves to death, that from their death there may be life for the world. On this holy ground words must be few, for here one may not tarry. But let

this be said, that there may be Calvary in a very real sense for God's own yet. We draw near it when in a supreme hour of religious experience we lay ourselves down utterly at the feet of God, when in the rare moment which may come in human life we offer God absolutely all that is ours—prospects, hopes, ambitions, aims, even life itself. There may come, besides, a very real Calvary in the life of service, and if it does come God will bear us through the ordeal. It may be that in some great service a man comes to know that he must die, slain by his service, in the flush of young strength, and that man knows in a measure the meaning of Calvary. Only let a man be true to God, and he will know his Calvary, if God wills that he must walk there, though, after all, there is in a manner Calvary for all of us. Amiel's words are wise: "Recognise your place; let the living live, and you, gather together your thoughts, leave behind you a legacy of feeling and ideas; you will be most useful so. Renounce yourself, accept the cup given you with its honey and its gall as it comes. Bring God down into your heart . . . make within you a temple for the Holy Spirit; be diligent in good works, make others happier and better.

Put personal ambition away from you, and then you will find consolation in living or dying, whatever may happen to you. . . . Let what is natural in you raise itself to the level of the spiritual, and let the spiritual become once more natural. Thus will your development be harmonious, and the peace of heaven will shine upon your brow—always on condition that your peace is made, and that you have climbed your Calvary." Let a man take all that is earthly and all that concerns the self-life into surrender to God so absolute that he, too, can say, "I am crucified with Christ," and he can add, "Nevertheless I live, yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." It is by the crucifixion of the flesh that we pass into the fulness of the Christ-life. Calvary stands in the path of the soul journeying to the life eternal, and the light of the life eternal is close behind the shadow of the Cross.

Though after the cross there was for the Christ the place of the tomb, that became, and excellingly, the place of life. Life surrendered is life won. For the Christlike the place of death is the place of life always. None who lived for God are dead. Every buried Christian is alive to-day in the life of the world. We rise

again, even in this Divine sense, that from the grave the radiant, mighty influence of holy personality revives, endures, and mingles dominatingly with the higher life of humanity. Nothing—not even a rock tomb—can prison the quickening and redeeming power of a holy life. For all who live in God there is no death; by their very dying they come to resurrection into a larger life of influence and service. Christ would have been alive even if no fair story of the stone rolled away by great angels had been told, and it would have been always for the world Easter Day.

There came last of all for Jesus the Mount of Olives, the place of vision and ascension. It is told us that after a little while with them Jesus led the eleven out to the slopes of Olivet, and there, in the act of blessing them, was received up out of their sight. This is the place of vision and ascension, because there Jesus beholds all the glory and promise involved in the earth service of stress and sacrifice, and there He rises above all the care and pain which the world brings for a Son of God. He was ever above the world in spirit—the ascension is final triumph. And there is a sense in which the place of vision and ascension is known by the Christian also.

When we have been with Christ all through, when we have been spiritually awakened, when we have decided on our path and settled our souls, when we have done the Father's will among the crowds of the world, when we have bravely made consecration of ourselves and served to the last, when we have been in Gethsemane and the judgment-halls, when we have climbed our Calvary—the moment of exaltation arrives. There is an hour of calm in which we see what all our life and service meant, or have a vision of the glory in which they issue—a vision in kind like that of Moses, who saw all the goodly land of promise from the peak of Pisgah, but a vision wider and diviner even than that. In this hour of exaltation the soul rises above the seen and temporal, and the experiences of the life lived with men and for men try us no more for ever. We sit together with the Christ in heavenly places, and we have rest unto our souls.

Into the midst of the varied and often hard and bitter experiences of mortal life a holy light shines eternally. They become blessed, for they are the Christ places since the Son of Man walked with men, and, doing the will of His Father in heaven, saved the world the

while He lived His human life out, calm, faithful, and fearless even unto death. To the Christ places all who follow Him are led, but the spell of His presence fills them with light and peace. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord," and it is for those who have been with Him on earth that the Christ's great prayer is prayed eternally: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

*Almighty God, the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Give us grace humbly to take up the Cross and follow Him. Keep us by Thy word and spirit faithful and believing always and in all things even unto death, that, having served Thee truly in the world, we may receive the crown of life and be for ever with the Lord. Amen.*

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